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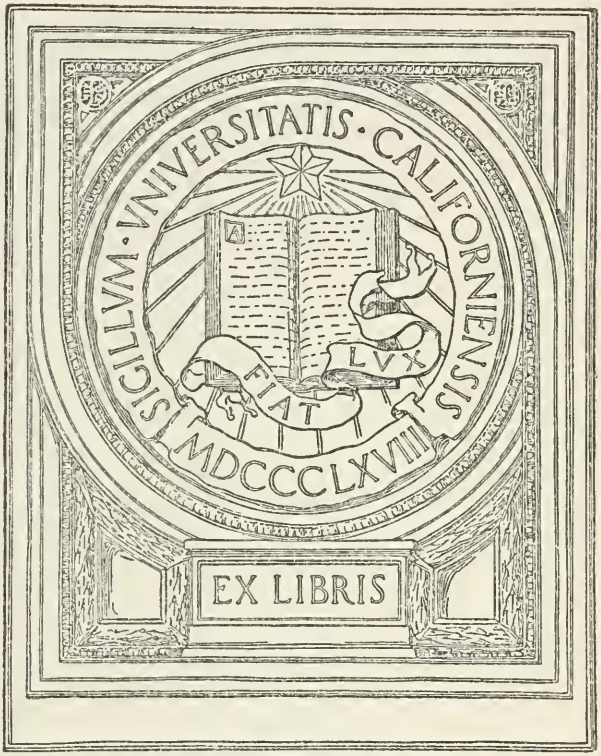
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UNCLE WALTER.

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VOL. II.

UNCLE WALTER.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

"FATHER EUSTACE," "THE BARNABYS," "MRS. MATHEWS,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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UNCLE WALTER.

CHAPTER I.

Not a word was uttered between the mother and daughter, during what probably appeared to both of them their long drive home. On reaching the mansion, Lady Augusta descended first; but waited in the hall till the young lady stood beside her. "Come with me into my own room, if you please," said Lady Augusta as she mounted the stairs; and Kate, without saying anything in reply, meekly followed her. Lady Augusta rang the bell as soon as she entered the room, and inquired if Dr. Harrington was in his study.

"Yes, my Lady," was the prompt reply;

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" my master is just come home, and I saw him go in there."

Lady Augusta then submitted herself to the hands of her maid, for the removal of bonnet and cloak and so forth, and then dismissed her.

" You can take off your bonnet, I presume ?" said the sarcastic lady. " It is probable, that you do not wish to accustom yourself to such personal attendance for the future. And now I shall leave you, in order to settle with your father in what manner it will be best for your unfortunate family to act, so as most effectually to protect themselves and you from the obloquy and disgrace which your present line of conduct must infallibly bring upon them, if not guarded against by all that watchful affection and enlightened good sense can achieve to prevent it."

" Do not fear me, mamma," said poor Kate; " I will do nothing, I will never do anything clandestinely. All I ask for, is the permission to refuse to make a man I can never love, my husband. Grant me this privilege, my dearest mother, and I will trust to time for bringing you to treat me in all respects, not as a naughty child, but as a reasonable woman."

" A reasonable woman !" repeated the angry

mother, in an accent of bitter contempt. "With your Uncle Walter, like a wild man of the woods, to counsel you, on one side, and an audacious lover running away from his dirty desk and his musty books to invite you to elopement, on the other, you are vastly likely to become a reasonable woman! But thank God, you are *not* a woman yet; and thanks to the wisdom of our glorious country, you have very nearly three long years to wait before you will have any more right or power to act for yourself, than if you were an infant in the eyes of your lover as well as in the eye of the law. There lies our safety, Kate, and not in your wisdom, you poor, silly, vain, deluded creature! Your Mr. Caldwell is, of course, quite ignorant of the unimportant fact of your having a handsome independent fortune! He never heard of such a thing, I dare say. Nothing but the most generous and disinterested attachment could have induced him to neglect all the amusing duties of his profession, in order to make love to you! But you do no good by weeping, Kate. I am now going to leave you to your own thoughts, and it will be more profitable for you to sit down quietly, and paint to yourself the difference between taking

your place in society as a peeress, with eighty thousand a-year, or living gloomily under the displeasure of your parents, waiting year after year, till the time shall come when you will be old enough to throw yourself into the arms of a needy lover, without their having any longer the power to prevent it!"

Having thus finished her harangue, Lady Augusta left the room, and poor Kate had the mortification of hearing her lock the door after she had closed it upon her. This was a species of degradation for which she was by no means prepared, and its effect upon her was extremely painful in every way. The most substantial evil it brought with it at the present moment, was the depriving her of her Uncle Walter's advice. It was her wish to put him more fully in her confidence than she had yet done, on the subject of her positive engagement to Mr. Caldwell. She knew, indeed, that Uncle Walter was already aware that she was attached to him; but she had not, as yet, fully communicated the particulars of the decisive little interview which had taken place in the conservatory, and one result of her meditations during her silent drive home, had been the determination of mounting

to the philosopher's garret immediately after her arrival there, and telling him everything. But now she became very painfully aware, poor girl, that all comfort and all benefit of any kind from that source was effectually withdrawn from her.

Meanwhile Lady Augusta descended the stairs, with the key of her room in her pocket; and feeling as great certainty, as that of Kate herself, that save for this precaution, her daughter would have passed the interval with the elder brother, which she was about to pass with the younger, she went to the door of her learned husband's study, and entered it "with the boldness of a wife," without even the ceremony of knocking, which was exacted from all others.

A restorative luncheon, accompanied by two bumper glasses of his favourite sherry, had done much towards restoring the Doctor to his usual comfortable condition of mind and body, and it was with his usual polite placidity of manner that he welcomed her Ladyship, exclaiming as she closed the door behind her:

"Well, my dear! I trust you have come to tell me that your admirable management has

overcome all difficulties, and that our dear Kate has been brought to a sense of her duty?"

"Not exactly that yet, Dr. Harrington. I am sorry enough to tell you, that there are difficulties in our way of which we never dreamed," replied the lady; "but we must be firm, my dear Doctor, and then I trust everything will go well at last. You may guess the state of my feelings at the present moment, when I tell you that the principal result of my interviews with Kate, was the receiving a confession from her that she was engaged, as she chose to call it, to be married to—who do you think, Dr. Harrington?" The Doctor shook his head impatiently. "Nay, you need not be in a hurry! You will hear it quite soon enough, Mr. Warden; and it may be that you will then become aware of a fact I have more than once remarked upon—namely, that you are not quite as cautious as you ought to be in giving invitations to young men. Your daughter tells me, Dr. Harrington, that she cannot possibly marry my Lord Goldstable, because she has engaged herself to marry Mr. Caldwell."

"Infamous blackguard!" thundered the enraged dignitary, utterly losing all power of

self-control, and becoming almost purple with passion. "Infamous scoundrel! who would abuse a father's confiding hospitality by robbing him clandestinely of his child! And as for her!—if she marries him—" and his upraised arm seemed to give warning that some terrible denunciation was coming; but his less vehement though fully as resolute companion stopped him.

"Do not expend your just and most perfectly righteous anger in words that may shock my ears, and your own too, perhaps, and which can do no good you know, when they are spoken. Moreover, I flatter myself that I have already arranged matters in such a way, as to render any such odious sin and folly as you fear, absolutely impossible. I have already told Kate that no such marriage ever shall, or ever can take place under any circumstances whatever! And now, if you will give me leave, I will just tell you the measures I have already taken, and those which I mean to take, if your ideas on the subject accord with mine. Fortunately, a word which dropped from Kate opened my eyes in time to another difficulty with which we have to contend. She hinted

pretty plainly, that your brother would not be likely to agree with us in his opinion of Mr. Caldwell as a husband for our daughter; and I immediately decided upon removing her from the danger of such very mischievous influence. In fact, I felt it to be extremely important that Kate should not be allowed to communicate at all with her Uncle Walter for the present."

"I agree with you perfectly, my dear, as to your theory on the subject; but I hardly know how you can put it in practice. How are you to prevent her communicating with him?" said the Doctor.

"A moment's patience, Doctor, and I will show you," she replied. "A good manager," she added, "will always find ways and means. But it was, as I am sure you must perceive, quite impossible for me just now to stand on any ceremony with our rebellious young lady, and accordingly, I hold her at this moment safely locked up in my own room."

"Admirable! my dear, you have done exactly the right thing!" replied the admiring husband. "It is precisely the right mode of teaching her what she is to expect, if she attempts to persevere in her abominable folly. And as

to poor Walter, I must confess that I perfectly agree with you, in thinking that he is not to be trusted on such a subject. His notions upon nearly every subject seem to be adapted to savage rather than to civilized life, and we must guard against his influence accordingly."

"Decidedly so," replied Lady Augusta, firmly. "But it will not do to keep her locked up, you know, and I therefore propose, with your good leave, to send her into the country to-morrow morning, accompanied by my sister, Lady Juliana; and there she must remain till we have effectually made this audacious young lawyer understand that he will no longer be received here as a guest."

"Quite right! Perfectly well arranged, my love," returned the Doctor; "but Lady Juliana must, you know, be cautioned."

"She shall be made acquainted with the facts, Dr. Harrington, and then there will be no cause whatever to fear her being indiscreet. I know she has many odd religious notions; but upon a subject of this kind, I will do her the justice to say that all her feelings will be quite in accordance with your own."

"Very well, then," returned the reasonable

divine, perfectly satisfied. "So let it be, my dear; and you may follow them into the country very shortly yourself. We shall all be going down to Glastonbury, you know, very soon, and I see no objection whatever, to her preceding us."

"I think I can suggest a better plan than that, Dr. Harrington," returned his wife, "and one which, if I mistake not, will remove her much more effectually from *all* pernicious influences. For you know it would immediately be conjectured that as we are going to Glastonbury, Kate would be going there too; and she might very easily be pursued thither. What I would propose is, that she and my sister, should set off to-morrow morning by the early train, which starts even before your brother can have left his room, and pay James a visit at Stanton. He too, as we both know, has some odd and objectional doctrines in his head, but he also may be trusted to feel exactly as he ought to do upon the matter in question. Both in his case and in that of my sister, I am quite sure that their abstract religious notions would have no effect whatever in influencing their opinions on any point, where the advantage of the family was concerned. I know too, that their religious

opinions differ, nay, that they are in precise opposition to each other; but on this subject they are sure, nevertheless, to think alike, and both together they are likely to urge the thing upon her mind with a degree of perseverance which, in the complete absence of all adverse influence, must, in the long run, tell upon her mind."

"Most true, my dear wife," said her approving spouse, with a look of the most benignant admiration. "I consider the idea as perfectly providential, and much may be expected from it. I will write to James instantly to announce his visitors. He will get the letter at his breakfast-table to-morrow, and his aunt and sister will be with him in good time for dinner. And now you had better go and prepare Lady Juliana for her journey."

* * * * *

And thus it was authoritatively decided that Kate should be delivered over to the keeping of her Puseyite brother, and her Evangelical aunt, in order to be ground down to the necessary point of obedient submission by their joint efforts.

CHAPTER II.

It was not many minutes after Lady Augusta had left the Doctor's study, when another knock was heard at its door; but on this occasion it was only the footman, who announced that Mr. Caldwell was in the hall, and begged to know if he might be admitted then.

But scarcely was the man allowed to make this announcement, before the sonorous voice of the dignified divine was heard in reply, and in a tone that might have been perfectly audible to any one at double the distance from which it was heard by the visitor in question.

"No, Sir!" it thundered, "I am not at home to Mr. Caldwell, and I beg you to observe that I never shall be at home to that individual upon any future occasion whatever!"

The first movement of surprise and indignation which this unexpected reception occasioned to the object of it, prompted him to turn on his heel, and quit the house. But before the servant had fully delivered this message, modified in its transmission into a civil "Not at home, Sir!" the anxious lover had changed his mind, and now demanded if he could see Mr. Walter Harrington.

"I will see, Sir," said the man, and as soon as it was well possible, he returned from the lofty quarters occupied by the old gentleman, with the assurance that Mr. Harrington would be very glad to see him.

In climbing to the abode of the attic philosopher, Mr. Caldwell had to pass before the door of Kate's cell, which had been rendered henceforth and for ever a sacred spot to him. But he little guessed that the jewel had been already removed from its casket; and that his own destiny, and that of her who was at least equally dear to him, would have undergone most important changes before this same precious jewel was restored.

On reaching Mr. Harrington's room, he found him, as usual, exceedingly busy; but

nevertheless he was received with hearty cordiality.

"I think I know all about it already, my dear fellow," exclaimed Walter, affectionately shaking the hand that was extended to him; "and though we may meet with some little difficulties and impediments in the way, I think we shall manage to make things all right at last."

"You know then, my dear Sir, that I was bold enough last night to confess to Miss Harrington that I love her? That I dared to offer her my hand? And that she did not refuse it?"

"Yes, Caldwell, I think I may say that I know all that already; though I cannot exactly say that these important facts were very distinctly communicated to me either. But knowing that my niece had just reached her room when I was approaching my own—for, in fact, I had followed her up the stairs—I went in to wish her good-night; and then I perceived such symptoms of agitation, as she threw her arms around my neck and kissed me, that I did not leave her till she had given me some little insight into what had been going on. Her

account was not, I confess, a very clear one; but I think I made out that she had promised to marry you, and that there were difficulties in the way of her keeping her promise. This morning I have heard still more about these said difficulties; but I flatter myself, Caldwell, that we shall be able to master them."

"You know then, my kind friend, that my suit is not acceptable to Miss Harrington's family?" said the young man, looking considerably paler than usual.

"I know," replied the old gentleman, "that some part of her family, at least, are very likely to oppose it; for I know also that within a very few minutes after my charming niece had accepted you, she assumed to herself the privilege of refusing a peer of the realm, with a yearly revenue of eighty thousand pounds. And I will not disguise from you, my dear Caldwell, that I suspect there may be some among us who will be of opinion that the second proposal ought to supersede the first."

"And Miss Harrington herself?" faltered the lover.

"I do not suspect that she will be one of them," replied Walter. "Do you?"

"No, Mr. Harrington, I do not," said Caldwell firmly. "I know her too well to believe it possible, after what passed between us last night. Yet how can I dare to hope, that so young and so gentle a creature will be able eventually to resist the authority, which will be exerted to prevent her fulfilling the hope she has given me?"

"It would be difficult for me, Caldwell, to give you any very satisfactory answer; but I see no reason why I should conceal from you that I have great confidence in Kate. It is quite true, as you say, that she is both young and gentle, nevertheless, I am greatly inclined to think that she is not weak. We shall see, Caldwell! we shall see! I will venture explicitly, however, to assure you of two important facts," continued Walter, seizing the agitated young man's hand, with a friendly grasp. "The first is, that my niece Kate will never marry any man whom she does not thoroughly love and esteem; and the second is, that she neither loves nor esteems poor silly Lord Goldstable in any degree whatever."

"I need not tell you that your words fall like balm upon a very troubled spirit. But though

I have implicit faith in what you say—for I should wrong her vilely could I doubt it—yet I think that you will be equally ready to agree with me, when I state my conviction that Miss Harrington will never marry against the consent of her parents. And how can I ever hope to obtain this, when such a proposal as that of Lord Goldstable is put in competition with mine?"

"Patience and courage, my young friend, may accomplish much," returned Walter, calmly. "Do not let us despair."

"Dr. Harrington refuses to see me now, in the very harshest manner possible," said Mr. Caldwell, colouring as he remembered the offensive words to which he had been an involuntary listener; "and knowing this, I feel that it would not be right to attempt seeing his daughter in his house. For the present, therefore, dear Mr. Harrington, I must leave my cause in your hands. Make her understand—make Miss Harrington understand—how deeply it pains me to know myself the cause of discord between her and her parents. But I should like her to know, too, that I feel perfectly sure that her manner of treating Lord Goldstable's

proposal would have been the same under any circumstances."

"And she shall know it, my dear Caldwell," replied the old man, kindly. "But poor Kate is over-tired by the ball, they tell me, and is gone to bed. Do you go to Miss Wigginsville's to-morrow? If so, I will see you there, and shall then be able to report progress, and tell you a little how matters stand."

"Assuredly I will go there," replied Caldwell; "and now I will leave you, carrying with me a heavy load of anxiety, yet not altogether unmixed with hope, for which I ought most devoutly to bless you. Let Miss Harrington understand the motives which prevent me from attempting to see her. I think she will appreciate them."

"Be very sure of it," replied Walter, cordially. "If every one concerned in this business behaved as well as you do, Caldwell, our difficulties would be very soon over. Farewell for the present. We shall not, as I flatter myself, be always obliged to part by necessity as we do now."

CHAPTER III.

GREAT was the surprise of Walter Harrington, on being told at the breakfast-table, on the following morning, that Kate had left town at a very early hour of the morning, accompanied by her aunt, the Lady Juliana. He had spent the whole of the preceding evening at the meeting of one of the numerous scientific societies to which he belonged, and had this day left the house at his usual early hour, in order to take his accustomed morning walk.

Under all the circumstances of the case, it might have occurred to any one, save Walter Harrington, that matters had been exactly so contrived, on purpose to prevent any interview from taking place between him and his niece,

previous to her departure. But he was much too inartificial himself to suspect any manœuvring in others, and no suspicion of the kind ever entered his head.

"Gone!" he exclaimed in reply to Lady Augusta's announcement of the fact, "surely she might have waited until I returned from my walk. She knows the time of my coming back so well, because we have always had a little talk together before going down to breakfast. Surely she might have waited to shake hands, and say good-by."

"My sister, Lady Juliana, is very particular about always setting off early, and, of course, her niece would on no account propose to change the hour of her departure for her own especial gratification. You must, therefore, acquit Kate of any intentional neglect, Mr. Harrington."

"There is no danger that I should accuse her of it," replied the old man, with something more nearly approaching a frown on his brow than was often seen there. "If Kate ever does wrong in any way, it will be at the suggestion of others, and not at her own. I have studied the character of your daughter carefully, brother

Henry," he continued, turning to the Doctor. "Her heart is pure, and her head is clear. If she goes wrong in any way, it will be because the way was not chosen by herself. Above all, brother Henry, be careful to let her marry the husband of her choice."

Between rage and muffin, Dr. Harrington really appeared at that moment to be in considerable danger of apoplexy, and as from sheer necessity he was obliged to remain speechless, the task of replying to Walter's very startling speech devolved on Lady Augusta.

"I must confess, Mr. Harrington," she said, with a degree of dignity that perhaps had some little mixture of austerity with it, "I must confess that your words surprise me. Perhaps if I said shock me, I should be guilty of no great exaggeration. It is very possible, Sir, that your long absence from Europe may have disqualified you from justly estimating and appreciating your brother's position in the world. Were this otherwise, were you more capable of comprehending his high responsibilities, and, through him, of the responsibilities of his family also, you would never have permitted yourself to utter such a phrase as that which we have just heard

from you. To my ears it sounds, I must confess, very like the sort of language and the species of advice which might be heard and listened to with impunity by the lower orders of the people. But when referring to the daughter of Dr. Harrington, and the grand-daughter of the Earl, my noble father, it has the effect of very painful coarseness. Surely, Sir," she continued, "you cannot think it right that parents should abdicate all control over a child, in a point the most important to her happiness, and that, too, in which she is least able to judge for herself?"

"Assuredly not, my dear sister-in-law," replied the old man, "but I will tell you in a few words what I do think. It is undoubtedly true that marriage is to a woman the most important step in life, the most awfully fraught with lasting weal or woe. True it is likewise, that at the age when most women marry, they are not likely to be very competent judges of the real, genuine characters of those who propose to them, and most assuredly I do think that parents are right in using their influence, and even their authority, over a child of tender years to prevent her marriage with a man whom they consider as unworthy, and that any girl who should act in

defiance of such authority, exercised on such grounds, would be most culpably imprudent."

"I was sure," interrupted the Doctor, "that my brother would, upon reflection, be found the advocate of that due submission and obedience to constituted authority which is the only bond and bulwark of society, which religion and polity alike require, and which divine and human laws equally enforce."

The Doctor was always apt to become wordy and pompous, when he got upon the favourite topic of the submission due from all classes and individuals in Church and State, who occupied positions beneath his own; but Walter listened very meekly, till his brother had reached a full stop, and then he said:

"I never was so unfortunate as to meet with any one who was not an advocate for *due* submission;"—there was something rather sly in the look and emphasis with which he said it, but the significance of this was not caught by either of his auditors—"however," he continued "I must confess, brother, that a parent who undertakes the duty of thus constraining the wishes of a daughter, assumes a very grave responsibility, and one that should be exercised

with very strict self-scrutiny, as to his own motives in the matter, in order that he may be quite sure that no consideration of what would be most personally agreeable to himself has any influence on his judgment. Under no conceivable circumstances, can it be otherwise than a most wicked and horrible tyranny to urge a daughter to a marriage that was repugnant to her, nor do I hesitate to say that a young girl would act well and wisely if, in defiance of the wishes of her parents, she married according to her inclinations, if the doing so were a means of escaping from a marriage in which her affections had no share."

"I am truly pained, brother Walter, truly pained, to hear you give utterance to theories so utterly subversive of—of—of everything. Very dangerous doctrines, brother Walter! Highly dangerous doctrines indeed!" groaned forth the scandalized and alarmed Doctor.

"I own that I am not sorry," said Lady Augusta, with a frown of considerable severity, "that the absence of Kate should have saved her from hearing such dreadful sentiments advocated. Utopian fancies will not do in civilized life, Mr. Harrington, and I must beg

you to understand, that I do not wish to have my daughter's mind disturbed by them."

"I am afraid, my good lady," replied Walter, "that you will find everything in the way of mischief, which my notions on this subject can do my niece, has been done already. She knows what I think about marriages made from other motives than those of affection. But will you tell me the grounds on which you consider a marriage between Kate Harrington and my young friend, Frank Caldwell, to be a *mésalliance*, as you call it?"

"In the first place, my dear Walter," replied the Doctor, with infinite dignity of manner and of accent, "in the first place, I might tell you that the name we bear would disgrace no family in the realm by intermarrying with it. A Harrington came over with William from Normandy; a Harrington is recorded as having fought bravely at Cressy, and at Agincourt. I own I am surprised that even you should have so thoroughly adopted the feelings of savage life, as to be insensible to the pride of bearing such a name."

"Nay, Harry!" replied the elder brother, laughing, "I am not even yet philosopher

enough to merit all your reprobation. I will be honest enough to confess, that I have still enough of old world notions hanging about me, to make me value an old and honourable name. But surely you have struck a very random stroke, brother, as regards the matter in hand. Caldwell's father was an estated gentleman, and his grandfather to boot; ay, and rotulorum too, and a gentleman born, brother parson, who wrote himself armigero in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation. Now Lord Goldstable's grandsire, brother Harry, was a Bristol merchant, who made the principal part of his huge fortune by trading in slaves."

"Lord Goldstable, Walter, is a peer of the realm," returned the Doctor, reddening, or rather purpling. "The Sovereign," he added solemnly, "is the fountain of honour, and the inherent power and faculty of ennobling resides in the monarch, as a portion of the divine right which not even the levelling heresies and aberrations of our sadly degenerate days have yet dreamed of disputing."

"It is at all events a power which monarchs of late years, or their heaven-born ministers for them, have laboured hard to discredit,"

replied the old man. "It would be a curious examination," he continued, "to go carefully through the true Englishman's *vade mecum*, the peerage, and to observe how large a portion of the names inscribed there have obtained this glory under circumstances involving anything but honour to the individuals so distinguished."

"What *can* you mean, brother Walter?" returned the Doctor, with every appearance of the most genuine astonishment. "I protest to you, that I have not the remotest idea of what you mean to insinuate by so startling and monstrous a suggestion."

"My meaning, Harry, is simply that no honour can be reflected on any man by the circumstance of his having been the fruit of a monarch's promiscuous amours. And less than none, from his having been the unscrupulous agent of a bad king's worst designs—or a judge corrupt enough to make justice bend to the wishes of the court—or lastly, though not leastly, from his having backed a ministry through thick and thin by unconstitutional influence in the House of Commons."

"My dear brother! my dear brother!" exclaimed the scandalized dignitary, looking posi-

tively terrified. "It is painful—it is very painful to me to hear you use such language. Trust me," he added, with a warning gesture of his upraised hand, "trust me, you are treading upon very dangerous ground, very fearfully dangerous ground, indeed! For myself, individually, I am happy to say that the convictions of my reason, and the duties of the important position which I hold, alike forbid my attempting to follow you in so frightful a course of speculation. But it must be evident to the most obtuse comprehension, that such ideas lead to conclusions subversive of all that mankind holds dearest and holiest. The most sacred bonds of society, and the most holy sanctions of religion are alike—"

"Hold! enough, my dear Harry!" cried Walter, laughing. "To save you the trouble of a provocation, I will plead guilty at once—guilty of holding many opinions which, if followed out to their consequences, might lead to the overthrow of many things that some men deem dear, and well-nigh holy. But, as you well observe, the duties of your position forbid you to speculate on such themes, for which reason we will pursue them no farther. To return,

however, to the point from which we started, let me ask you seriously, my dear brother, whether you are really bent on marrying your daughter, who loves another man, to this silly young nobleman, because he has an income of eighty thousand a-year? If this be so, I can only say that I am truly sorry you should have set your heart upon such a scheme, for I am quite sure you will never succeed in it."

"And may I ask, Mr. Walter Harrington, on what grounds you predict what, under the circumstances of the case, we must consider as a heavy misfortune to your brother's family? Kate has hitherto on all occasions shown herself well disposed to be a good and obedient daughter, and I see no reason to doubt her being so still."

"She is a dear, good child!" returned the old, man not without emotion, "and I feel strongly persuaded that in this important matter she will act in strict accordance with what she believes to be her duty. But are you quite sure that you know how his youthful Lordship will act after Kate's abrupt departure, upon receiving his proposal?"

"On that point," replied Lady Augusta,

with a slight toss of her head, "no one can reasonably entertain the slightest doubt. It is impossible that any young man could manifest a more decided determination to win a lady's hand then Lord Goldstable has done, and there was nothing in her manner of receiving his proposal that ought to discourage him. The timidity of a very young girl on such an occasion, is not very likely to discourage any man."

"Well! we shall see," replied Walter. "Let the affair end as it may, we shall none of us have anything to regret, if the result be the lasting happiness of our dear Kate. But tell me," he added, "where is she gone? and when do you expect her back?"

Lady Augusta directed a meaning look towards the Doctor, who had been discussing his breakfast in silence during the above conversation between his wife and brother, well pleased to be relieved from the necessity of taking any part in it; and having by this expressive glance put him upon his guard, she replied to the old gentleman's queries by saying vaguely:

"Both will depend very much upon circumstances, Mr. Harrington. My sister has *carte*

blanche. We wish Kate to change the air, and to be amused, for she certainly, like most other young ladies, has been made rather nervous by this sudden proposal. They may go to Glastonbury, or they may go to Stanton, and probably they will visit both."

"So then the Lady Juliana has what we may call a roving commission," replied the old man. "Well! I suppose you will hear from them shortly, and I trust it will not be very long before we have our pretty Kate amongst us again. Meanwhile I, for one, shall miss her sadly at the party to-night. I fully intended to make her my cicerone."

"What party is there to-night?" inquired her Ladyship; "I am aware of none."

"What, sister! have you forgotten the conversazione at Casa Wigginsville, as Caldwell calls it? Of course you mean to go?"

But in reply to this, Lady Augusta protested that the Wigginsville parties were the greatest bores known in the civilized world, and that positively her health and spirits were not equal to the exertion of appearing at them. So it was settled that the Doctor and his brother

should go as representatives of the whole Harrington family; and the trio at the breakfast-table broke up, the Doctor to doze over the newspaper in his study, his brother to be present at the reception of some new inmates at the Zoological Gardens, and the Lady Augusta to pay an early visit to her friend Lady de Paddington in quest of the latest news of Lord Goldstable's movements.

CHAPTER IV.

But neither the splendid specimens at the Zoological Gardens, nor yet the brilliant mixture of science, art, wit, and wisdom assembled at Casa Wigginsville in the evening, could do much towards making the warm-hearted philosopher happy in spirit or easy in mind. Kate and her difficulties haunted him, not only through the day, but through many hours of the night also. The more he meditated on the subject, the more fully he became convinced that all his own feelings and opinions were too completely in opposition to those of his brother and his brother's wife, to leave any rational hope of his being able to influence them in the manner he wished; and the final result of all his medita-

tions on the subject, was resolving to seek an interview with Lord Goldstable himself.

The old man felt that the interview would be a strange one, and that the awkwardness of it would certainly be considerably increased by his not being the nearest of kin to the fair lady, to whom the noble and wealthy suitor had so impetuously declared himself; but, nevertheless, he resolved upon the measure, as offering a better chance of a successful issue than any attempt he could make to convince his reverend brother and noble sister-in-law, that they would be committing a grievous sin by compelling their gentle daughter, either to marry the man she did not love, or give up the man she did.

Having made up his mind to this spirited, but somewhat eccentric, course of proceeding, he felt more tranquil, and slept as soundly through the night as he was wont to do of old, after a long day of forest wandering. The next morning, the old gentleman rose at his usual early hour as ardent and eager to act upon the resolution he had taken on the preceding night, as if he had been a score or two years younger; so he directed his early walk to the lodgings of the young peer, never

doubting that he would find him up, but rather fearful that he might not be early enough to catch him before he went out.

It was a pretty considerably long time, however, before his stoutly reiterated summons at the young man's door succeeded in obtaining any notice whatever; but at length a yawning, half-dressed servant presented himself, who after staring at him for a minute or two, such as he might have done if holding enforced communication with a madman, condescended at length to inform him that Lord Goldstable breakfasted at twelve, and never left his bedroom earlier.

"Poor lad! poor lad!" ejaculated Walter. "Well, my man, give him this card, with my compliments, when he does get up, and tell him I will call upon him again between twelve and one."

And so saying, the old forester turned to pursue his morning walk, meditating as he went on the strange perversion of all natural feeling which must take place, before a young fellow of Lord Goldstable's age could be induced to lie in bed till mid-day. And having heaved a kindly sigh for all such unfortunates,

he turned his thoughts towards the delicate interview which he was seeking, and upon the probable results of it.

But if the old gentleman looked forward with some degree of anxiety to this interview with the sluggish stripling, that of Lord Goldstable upon the same subject was infinitely greater. When on ringing his bell at about eleven o'clock, his valet handed to him Walter's card, and very distinctly delivered to him the message by which it had been accompanied, his young Lordship betrayed a degree of surprise, or, more correctly speaking, of alarm, which very considerably astonished and puzzled that usually very intelligent functionary. It could scarcely enter into this reasoning individual's philosophy, to believe it possible that a nobleman of his master's rank and revenue could greatly care for the coming or going of any mortal man; but that he should be thus strongly moved by a card and a message from such a decidedly unfashionable old codger as the early afoot old forester, had something in it absolutely revolting to all his principles and all his feelings; and when his master asked him with nervous eagerness why

he had not waked him immediately, the indignant valet replied, with very evident disgust: "Indeed, my Lord, I should never have thought of such a thing. It would be a deal more fitting, that such a queer-looking old fellow as that should wait your Lordship's time, let him be whom he may, than that your Lordship should put yourself out of the way, and be waked up from your sleep to see him."

"Well, Simpson, perhaps that's right too, seeing that I am come of age, and altogether my own master. But I say, Simpson, he didn't seem angry, did he?"

"Angry, my Lord?" replied the man, who almost began to suspect that the golden calf he so devoutly worshipped must have some portion of lead in it. "I am sure, my Lord, I don't know whether he was angry or not. It never came into my head to think that your Lordship could care whether such a sort of person as that was angry with your Lordship or not."

"I did not mean angry with me, Simpson, of course," returned the corrected nobleman, turning very red. "But he might be angry with you, you know, for not waking me; that is what I meant."

"I know my duty, my Lord, too well to care whether such a person was angry or not; and, asking your Lordship's pardon, I should say that them has most cause to be angry who is waked out of their natural sleep, and called from their beds at such undecent hours. Why this old, person, my Lord, was here, knocking at the door, between six and seven o'clock this morning," added the civilized London domestic, shivering from head to foot, as he rehearsed this thoroughly savage trait of the wild man of the woods. "I can't say that it ever came into my head, that he ought to be angry with anybody."

Lord Goldstable did not dispute the point, but proceeded with the business of dressing himself, in silent, but by no means pleasant, meditation on the coming interview; while his valet performed his share of the business in equal silence, his temper being rather disagreeably affected by the suggestion that such an individual as the grey-haired old forester should have presumed to feel angry with him.

While stating the mutual anxiety of Lord Goldstable and Walter Harrington, as they were each occupied in meditating on the difficulties

of their approaching interview, it is impossible not to recall the pithy lines:

"'A different cause,' said Parson Sly,
'A like effect may give;
Poor Lubin weeps lest he should die,
His wife, lest he should live.'"

For their anxieties arose from views as diametrically opposed as those described by the poet. The reader can be at no loss to understand the honest and kindly hopes and fears which harassed the mind of Walter; but it may be necessary to recall the conversation which passed between the young peer and his intriguing old aunt, when his Lordship first showed symptoms of uncertainty respecting the durability of the tender passion he had professed for Miss Harrington. The present emotion of the noble, but inconstant youth, arose from the remembrance of Lady de Paddington's very solemn assurance, that if he now declined to marry the beautiful young lady whose hand he had so abruptly solicited, he would lay himself open to all the pains and penalties consequent upon an action of breach of promise of marriage.

The idea of being immediately obliged to

marry the shy young lady, who had been so over-modest as to run away from him, instead of going on making lots of love to the beautiful widow of Jermyn Street, was exceedingly disagreeable to him: nothing, perhaps, could appear more so, except the being held up as an object of universal scorn and ridicule, by means of being brought into a public court for breach of promise of marriage.

This last was indeed a misery which he felt himself totally unable to face.

He longed for the world's admiration, and dreaded its censure with a vehemence in exact proportion to his ignorance of the real value of either; and he was now working himself into a perfect agony of nervous agitation, from believing that the Mr. Harrington, whose card lay before him, and whom he well remembered to have seen pointed out with his stately stature and flowing grey hair, as the uncle of the young lady to whom he had offered his hand, was now come to demand explicitly whether he were ready to proceed with the matrimonial contract he had so impetuously begun.

At length, within a very few minutes after twelve o'clock, came the expected knock at

the house door, and the heart of Lord Goldstable immediately leaped into his throat.

"There he is!" exclaimed the terrified youth, jumping up; "and I have not even thought yet of one word that I am to say to him! What a confounded fool I was to want to be made into a man of fashion, by marrying the very first handsome girl I looked at! How I wish that my confounded Aunt de Paddington had been at the bottom of the sea, before I ever set eyes on her!"

And as this vain wish exhaled itself, accompanied by a suppressed groan, the door of the room opened, and Walter Harrington entered. There was no door at which the very unfortunately silly young peer could creep out, and therefore he faced him, with his light hair, through which he had just passed his agitated hand, standing very much on end, and his fair young face as red as scarlet.

But Lord Goldstable's first terrified glance at him, was the last that expressed any mixture of pain. Walter entered, holding out his hand to Lord Goldstable, with such a frank and cheering smile upon his kind face, and with such a cordial friendliness of manner, that one moment was

quite sufficient to tranquillize all the terrors of the poor peer, and almost to set him at his ease.

"I have taken the liberty of calling on you, Lord Goldstable," said he, coming to the point at once, "in order to have a little conversation with you respecting my niece. I rather suspect that you have fallen into a mistake about her."

"It is very true, Mr. Harrington; I will not deny it for a minute," said his Lordship, eagerly interrupting him. "But when my aunt, Lady de Paddington, told me it was a mistake, I never stuck to it—I didn't, indeed; upon my word and honour I didn't. I gave in directly, and took her running away in that shy manner, just in the sense that my aunt told me I ought to take it. And I am not so ignorant, Mr. Harrington, as not to know that your niece has all the right on her side; and of course, Sir, I am sure—that is, I mean to say, as a man of honour and a gentleman, I am ready to do all that is expected of me."

"Expected of you, my Lord! What can you be talking of? What do you suppose is expected of you? And by whom, my Lord?" repeated Walter Harrington, thoroughly puzzled.

"Why by all London, to be sure!" replied his young Lordship, rather querulously. "By all the fellows at the clubs, and the opera, and the House of Lords, and all the rest of 'em. I know all about it, Sir, though I am so newly come to London. I have not forgotten one single word of it. But you may depend upon it, Mr. Harrington, there shan't be wanting any action of *crim. con.*, or anything of that sort to bring me up to the scratch. There shan't, indeed, my dear Sir. You seem inclined to behave very politely to me, and you shall see I deserve it."

Walter Harrington opened his eyes to their utmost extent, and for a moment stood silently staring at him in utter amazement. "Action of *crim. con.*, Lord Goldstable!" he exclaimed at last. "What on earth have you got into your head? Are you dreaming?"

"No, no, that's not the name of it, either," rejoined the puzzled boy, looking vexed, irritated, and bashful, all in one. "But whatever the name of the law is, don't think of it, pray, Sir; for I do assure you, upon my word and honour, that I fully intend to do everything that is right, and everything that the world expects of me."

Walter now looked at him with vastly more of kindness than of anger, for he really began to doubt whether his simple-looking companion had not, somehow or other, been frightened out of the little wit that niggard nature had bestowed upon him. "My dear young friend," said Mr. Harrington, kindly, "depend upon it, we shall be more likely to understand each other, and more able to put everything in its true light so as to conduce to the happiness of all the parties concerned, if you will consider the subject of this projected marriage between you and my niece, solely with reference to the two parties principally concerned, leaving altogether out of the question, the expectations of the world in general respecting it."

"I am sure it is very kind of you to say so, Mr. Harrington," returned the young man, struck by the unmistakeably friendly and sincere manner of the old gentleman. "You really are very kind, indeed, and I am sure I would wish nothing better than just to listen to you and follow your advice. But you know, Sir, that even putting the case that I no longer wanted to marry Miss Harrington, I could not draw back. I am not going to deny that I certainly did

make her an offer; and we all know that as a gentleman and a man of honour, I ought to stick to it."

"Allow me to assure you, my dear Sir," returned the kind, but now proud-looking, old man, "allow me to assure you that you have, somehow or other, been led to conceive extremely mistaken notions on this subject. Why do you suppose that, if you were no longer desirous of marrying Miss Harrington, you would still be under the necessity of doing so?"

"Why, because all the fellows would point at me if I did not; and, besides that, of course her father would take the law of me."

"You have been misinformed on this subject, Lord Goldstable," replied Walter, gently but very gravely. "I will assume the responsibility of assuring you myself, my Lord, that you may wholly dismiss from your mind this very mistaken and preposterous apprehension. I will undertake to say, that my brother, Dr. Harrington, will not seek to compel you in any way to marry his daughter," said Walter, with a voice and manner which made it clear, even to the dull comprehension of his startled young companion, that he had, in some way or other, said

something that he ought not to have said. So he hastened, poor youth, to reply, in a greatly humbled tone :

"Well then, I am sure it is very handsome of him, very; and it's very handsome and very friendly of you to come and tell me so. And I won't deny that it's more than I had any right to expect. And what's more, Mr. Harrington, it is a great deal more than some of his friends expect of him."

"And may I ask you, Lord Goldstable," returned Walter, whose momentary feeling of indignation was now giving way to a strong desire to laugh, "may I ask which of Dr. Harrington's friends expected that he would have recourse to legal coercion, in order to compel you to become his son-in-law?"

"Why my aunt, Lady de Paddington, did," replied the young man, eagerly. "She said that for a certainty, and without any shadow of doubt about the matter, Dr. Harrington, the father of the beautiful Miss Harrington, would bring an action of *crim. con.* against me, or whatever the newspapers call it. I am not quite certain about the name of the law, but she said most positively that nothing in the

whole world could, or would prevent it, if I gave the very least sign of going back from the offer of marriage."

"Well then, my dear young man, I must take the liberty of telling you that your aunt has endeavoured to influence your conduct by uttering a most unjustifiable fiction. What her motive may have been, I will not pretend to guess; but believe me, when I assure you, that she has thought proper, for some reason or other, most deliberately to hoax you. I flatter myself that you will at once, and for ever, dismiss this most absurd statement from your mind."

"Well, Mr. Harrington, I shall always be ready to say as long as I live, that you have behaved in the very kindest way to me that any gentleman ever did, and I don't think I ever felt so grateful to anybody in the whole course of my life."

"Then, if I understand you rightly," returned Walter, with a merry smile, "you are not now quite so desperately in love with my little niece as you thought you were, eh?"

"Oh! I never said that, Sir!" exclaimed the young man hastily, and colouring to the very tips of his ears. "I am sure I—"

"Nay, nay," returned Walter, now laughing outright, "there is no harm done. You are not the first man who said over-night, what he was sorry to remember the next morning. But in this case, at least, there will be no broken hearts to lament over."

"Indeed, Sir, you are very kind. I really do take it very kind of you," said the greatly relieved, but still embarrassed peer; "and if—that is, suppose I was to—I mean, if Miss Harrington did not—in real truth, then, if I was to cry off, should not I behave very bad? What would Dr. Harrington say? and what would Miss Harrington say? and what would the world say?"

"My good young friend," returned Walter, more gravely, "once more let me advise you to leave the world altogether out of the question. Depend upon it, the world would not be greatly troubled about the matter. If half-a-dozen gossips talk about your falling in love with my niece to-morrow, they will be talking about something else the day after. And as to what my niece will say, I think you must forgive me if I remind you that you have pretty good grounds upon which to form your opinion of what she will say, if you will only remember

what she *did* at the time you honoured her with your proposal."

"Why what did she do?" demanded his Lordship, eagerly.

"I think your Lordship must remember," replied Walter, with a quiet smile, "that her only reply was running away from you."

"She *did* mean to refuse me, then," replied the delighted lover, with sudden exultation, "and I was right then, though nobody would believe me. Aunt de Paddington positively declared that her running away without saying anything, was the most perfect acceptance possible, and that all well-behaved young ladies always did so when they were too modest to say *yes* outright. And you really do think that she meant to refuse me out and out, in real earnest?"

"However incredible it may appear to your Lordship's friends," returned the old man, smiling, "I am afraid that such was unquestionably the fact."

"It was my old aunt, Lady de Paddington, who contradicted me flat when I said so," returned the young man, "she did, upon my word and honour; and she said that girls

always did so. Well, then, Mr. Harrington, I *was* refused and we're all right, and there is no more to be said about the matter."

And as his young Lordship uttered these satisfactory words, he rubbed his hands with an air of the most joyous exultation.

"I am afraid," returned the old man, with a degree of severity that was very unusual to him, "I am afraid that I now see through the whole affair. There has been a regular conspiracy to bring about a marriage between you and my niece. But thanks to a little plain-dealing and honest sincerity, both on her side and on yours, the plot has failed. But, my dear Lord, the matter is not, as you fancy, wholly at an end. Some little care must still be taken to prevent the young lady from suffering any further inconvenience, and I trust to your good-nature for acting in such a manner as to spare her, as much as possible, from suffering from the consequences of your thoughtless offer."

"Well now, Mr. Harrington, I thought it all seemed quite clear," returned the young man, in a tone that indicated great disappointment. "However, I am sure I am ready, as I ought to be, to do anything and everything that you tell me it is proper I should do."

"I am confident, Lord Goldstable," replied Walter, "that when I have explained to you a little how the matter stands, you will readily do what is necessary to spare Miss Harrington from any farther annoyance. You asked me just now what my brother, Dr. Harrington, would say if all question of this marriage were given up; and I will frankly tell you that he will be very much disappointed. Your rank and fortune, my young friend, are such as would make most parents, who are ambitious of a great match for a daughter, exceedingly unwilling to give up the chance of catching you. Now the fact is, that though my good little niece did most unequivocally and decidedly wish to make you understand that she declined the flattering offer of your hand, her parents still persist in declaring that, on account of her youth, this refusal is not to be considered by you as final. She has already suffered very severely from this very foolish and very unfortunate affair, having fallen under the heavy displeasure of both her parents for wishing to decline your proposal. It has, believe me, my Lord, been a source of great distress to her; and if she is compelled, by your Lordship's persisting in your

suit, to continue to refuse your hand, in defiance of the wishes of her father and her mother, it will infallibly be the cause of much increased suffering to her. I do not and cannot doubt, that you must be sorry for having brought this unhappiness upon her by the idle offer which you so thoughtlessly made; and the only mode by which you can protect her from the effect of her father's anger, and indeed from all farther molestation of any kind, is by frankly stating to Dr. Harrington, that upon farther consideration you desired to withdraw the offer you had made, having reason to believe that its acceptance would not be likely to contribute to the happiness of either party."

"Oh, goodness gracious, Mr. Harrington!" ejaculated the terrified young nobleman; "how in the world shall I ever be able to say that? Only just think of the rage of my old aunt! Oh dear! oh dear! what will Lady de Paddington say? And what will Dr. Harrington say? And how do you think I shall ever be able to answer them? Is there no other way? Couldn't you say it for me, dear, kind Mr. Harrington?"

"I am afraid that would not answer the purpose, my Lord," replied the old man, with as

much solemnity of manner as he could assume. "My brother is already aware that my opinion on the subject does not agree with his, and that I am, on the contrary, strongly opposed to the scheme of forcing my niece to consent to a marriage which she confesses to be contrary to her inclinations, so that I know beforehand that he would not listen to me on the subject. Besides, Lord Goldstable, it is, in my opinion, more proper in every way that you should yourself undo the mischief you have done."

"Well then, I will do it, Mr. Harrington; I will indeed, because it would be my wish to do exactly what would please you, on account of the great kindness you have shown me, and your taking it for granted that I would not go on acting wrong, if I did but know what was right. I am quite willing to do whatever you would have me. But you will stand by me, eh, Mr. Harrington? You will tell me what I ought to say, and take my part afterwards, won't you? Come now, Mr. Harrington, promise me one thing, and then I shan't mind my Aunt de Paddington a single straw. It would be so monstrous kind of you! I am going the day after to-morrow to my place in Derbyshire,

called Brandon Abbey, you know. I have never been there yet, and everybody tells me that it really is a monstrously fine place, and it is only a mile or two from the railroad station at Barnly. Now if you would be so very kind as to go down with me, and stay for a little time, I would write to Dr. Harrington from the Abbey, and say everything that you tell me I ought to say. It will make everything easy and right, if you will only stay with me for a little while, just to show, you know, that I am not a good-for-nothing, false-hearted fellow in your opinion. Now do come, Mr. Harrington! Do, pray come!"

Walter paused for a moment to consider this unexpected proposition, which notwithstanding its startling abruptness, was not altogether an absurd one. His presence as a guest in the house of Lord Goldstable, would certainly have the effect of countenancing the steps he was urging the young man to take, and must testify very decidedly, that if in truth there had been any notion of a marriage between the young peer and Miss Harrington, it had passed off without offence on either side.

Moreover, it so happened that Brandon Abbey was in the immediate neighbourhood of Stanton Parva, and he should therefore, by going there, be close to his unknown nephew James, whom he was anxious to see; this expedition too, would enable him to visit his own long-forsaken ancestral mansion, which he was well enough inclined to visit, if he could do so without making any fuss or parade about it. So after the meditation of a minute or two, he very frankly and cordially accepted the invitation; and in about five minutes more, it was settled that on the next day but one, they should leave town together at eight o'clock in the morning.

The young man was evidently delighted by the project, and the old one considerably amused both by the suddenness of the arrangement, and the seeming incongruity of the circumstances which led to it. But, notwithstanding both the strangeness and the incongruity, Walter Harrington was inclined to think, as he deliberately meditated on the scheme, that it would be difficult to find another equally well calculated to smoothe the somewhat thorny path which lay before them.

CHAPTER V.

The interview recorded in the last chapter, left Lord Goldstable a very much happier man than he had been before it took place. He now, as he very triumphantly told himself, saw his way clearly before him, and perceived no reason to doubt that if he did not immediately become the most fashionable man in London, he was in a very fair way of being the happiest. He snapped his fingers in the most light-hearted style as the recollection of his old aunt, and all her legal threatenings recurred to him, and actually whistled "Polly put the kettle on," from excess of glee, as he thought of the contrast between his actual situation, and the glory of taking that famous old fellow, Mr. Harrington,

down to Brandon Abbey with him, and the having to be taken before all the judges and justices of peace in London, to answer to an accusation of *crim. con.* or *felo de se*, or something of that sort.

In short, he was a vast deal happier than he had ever been in the whole course of his life before, and the delightful consciousness that there was no longer any impediment to his throwing himself, his coronet, and his fortune at the feet of the enchanting widow, gave the last bright finish to the delightful future which appeared opening before him.

With the instinctive reverence which feebleness ever feels for strength, he both clung to, and bowed before, the straightforward manly influence of Walter Harrington; he felt at once he was his shield and buckler; and he would willingly have sacrificed many of his annual thousands, rather than have lost the friendship which Walter's kindly eye had seemed to promise him.

For, in truth, the young man (as the phrase goes) had no harm in him, and his natural impulses were almost always rather good than bad; so that if he really had the immense good

fortune of inspiring the warm heart of the old forester with a friendly feeling towards his youth, and his guileless folly, it was quite on the cards that as an eating, drinking, digesting, and legislating individual, he might do his duty in that state of life wherein fate and our social system had placed him, quite as satisfactorily as many other peers of the realm.

But while Lord Goldstable's good genius was thus making a benign effort in his favour, the young man himself, as often happens to poor blundering mortals, was bent on making a move in a diametrically opposite direction.

No sooner had Walter left him, than Simpson, the valet, was again summoned, and a second toilette was commenced, with infinitely greater alacrity than the first had been, on that eventful morning. And when it is confessed that the end and object of this was an immediate visit to the fascinating widow in Jermyn Street, it will be readily understood that the process, though gayer, was nevertheless, infinitely more elaborate than the former one.

And off he set, poor boy, as soon as it was completed, with all the wilful eagerness with which a moth sweeps onward, with all its

strength, towards the bright but baleful light, which is sure to scorch, if not absolutely to consume it.

His present visit was very deliberately intended to be of a different and much more decisive character than that which has been already described. The heavy consciousness of his entanglement had then stood in his way, and prevented his opening his heart to the bewitching object of his affections, in the manner he now fully intended to do.

It will easily be believed, that Mrs. Fitzjames had not been slow in perceiving that, for some reason or other, the boy was under restraint with her. But as he had made no effort to conceal his passionate admiration of her charms, she was quite contented to "bide her time," which she felt very comfortably certain would not be far distant, let this troublesome restraint proceed from what cause it might. She was very comfortably assured that he was not married already, and short of this obstacle to her noble projects, she feared none.

The clever creature failed not to discover, almost as soon as he appeared before her, that some change had come over him. The tem-

pered light of her rose tinted and delicately scented little drawing-room, was quite sufficient to enable her to see that his smile was more gay, and his step more buoyant, than they had been before. She wasted not a moment in meditation as to what the cause might be; that so it was, was fully enough for her. It was exactly all she wanted, and she already felt that the struggle was over, and the victory well nigh achieved.

As usual, she was reclining on her *chaise longue*, precisely in the position most favourable to the display of all the beauty and of all the grace of which she was so triumphantly conscious. A soft, low chair stood ready for the visitor to sink into, at no great distance; and even that distance might be easily lessened, for the chair rolled smoothly on its castors.

Of course she was reading. Such ladies always are reading, if they do not happen accidentally to be half asleep. She started violently as he approached her, as if the seeing him was exactly the last thing in the world that she expected.

"You are come to me again, dear old friend!" she exclaimed, with a sort of plain-

tive pleasure; as if the happiness caused by seeing him could neither be denied nor concealed, but as if it was accompanied by a bashful, timid, trembling sense of danger.

"Ain't you an angel then, to look so beautifully glad to see me? and that too before you have got the least bit of a notion whether I am a false-hearted fellow or not!" he exclaimed, seizing her hand, and hugging it very lovingly.

"False-hearted, Edward!" she replied, indignantly. "No! Your father's son could never be false-hearted to my father's daughter! And yet," she added, mournfully, laying the hand which he had left at liberty upon his shoulder, "a woman may be made very miserable, even though no false heart responded to her true one!"

"You ain't the woman that is to be made miserable: that is to say, if you really feel about me as you seem to do," said he. "You certainly do seem to like me a little, Sophia—only a little, you know. Don't suppose that I am such a fool of a puppy, as to fancy you like me a great deal."

"Oh! Edward, Edward! How wildly you

talk! And how gaily, how jestingly! Alas, alas! the heart of a woman and the heart of a man are things so widely different."

"Well, I don't know about that," he replied. "And it is very possible you may be right, Sophia; because I am sure that a man's face and a woman's face are no more alike than a coal shovel and a lady's fan. Now if you could but just see our two faces put close together," pursued the bold boy, suiting the action to the word, "you might say there was a difference."

"Ah! dearest Edward!" returned the beautiful widow, gently interposing her delicate hand between his cheek and her own. "How well you know the power that years of friendship between our families has given you. But be generous, Edward! You know I cannot be angry with you. It would be perfectly unnatural in me if I were to attempt it."

"Then don't attempt it, my beautiful Sophia!" replied the not-much discouraged youth, audaciously saluting her lips in a style very nearly approaching that of a cow-boy when catching a juvenile dairy-maid at a disadvantage.

"Edward! too dear, too daring Edward!

Be generous! oh, be generous! and protect me from myself!" she murmured, burying her face, whether blushing or not, on his shoulder.

"Generous!" replied the young noble, repeating the offence. "I don't know whether it is generous or ungenerous to tell the truth without fear or favour. But I say you are an angel, and I'll knock down any man in England, or Scotland either, who would dare to contradict me."

"Edward! dear Edward! oh, do not jest! oh, do not trifle with me!"

"Trifle — jest?" exclaimed the impassioned peer. "Upon my life and soul, Sophia, I never was more in earnest in my life. And now, then, if you will but listen to me patiently, and not put yourself into such a tantivy, I'll tell you what I am come here for. I am come here, Sophia, for nothing else in the whole world, and for no other reason upon God's earth, but just to tell you downright and straightforward that I am over head and ears in love with you; and that I want you to be mine, Sophia, for good and all. Do you understand me, my darling? I want you to be Lady Goldstable, you know. You understand that, don't you, Sophia?" he added,

in rather a business-like tone, very evidently for fear of her making any mistake as to the extent of his generosity.

But his young Lordship was by no means prepared for the reception that awaited his generous proposal. Scarcely were the important words pronounced, before the lady's head fell back upon the sofa, and her eyes closed, while a convulsive working of every feature, and a most tumultuous heaving of the thinly-veiled bosom, proclaimed to the greatly terrified young nobleman that his adored Sophia was either in a fit, or else in the crisis immediately preceding one.

It is true, indeed, that the lovely lady did not change colour; but this did not prevent the inexperienced gentleman from being horribly frightened, and he would have infallibly spoiled a very pretty "situation," by violently ringing the bell, if his Sophia had not clutched him very vigorously by the hand which still held hers.

And in this attitude he was, perforce, obliged to stand quietly by her side for a minute or two —for no shorter interval would have sufficed to enable her to take such a view of present circumstances as could enable her to decide, definitively, upon the best course for her to pursue

under the existing exigencies of the case. Though the first great object was gained, *videlicet*, the positive offer of marriage, everything was not yet quite plain sailing before her. Her position, for the attainment of her object, was not at all points a very strong one. She would have said herself, if asked to explain it, that she was suffering, like every other woman gifted by nature with more attraction than their neighbours, from cruel, unmitigated, and totally unfounded slander.

Not few, indeed, were the equivocal adventures of which she was said to have been the heroine; and though London had never, as yet, been the scene of these, and though, moreover, she had, by excellent good management, obtained an *entrée* into other *salons* as much *comme il faut* as that of Lady Augusta Harrington, she knew perfectly well that great danger would be likely to attend the notoriety, which would be sure to attach to the name of the lucky lady who would be proclaimed as the fortunate winner of the great Goldstable stakes.

The question which suggested itself to her at this important moment therefore, was whether she should at once confess her love and joy, and

then fall into such a paroxysm of timid tenderness as would prevent her knowing a single moment's peace till she felt his *written* promise resting in her bosom, and for ever pressing, with delicious certainty, against her throbbing heart; or, should she venture to postpone this precautionary measure for a little while, so as to afford time and opportunity for wrapping her fascinations closer and closer still about him, till such a promise could be asked for with still greater safety than at present.

In considerably less time than would have been necessary to convert the trembling alarm of the novice lover into any feeling bordering upon common sense, the enchanting Mrs. Fitzjames, deciding upon the bolder course, determined upon postponing, at least for the moment, the important business of the written promise, whilst she gave herself up wholly to love and rapture.

And the moment this bold decision was arrived at, a sweet, but very languid, smile stole over the working features of the beautiful widow. Her closed eyes opened, and were raised to her enraptured lover's face with an ineffable expression of tenderness and gratitude; the convulsive heaving of the fair bosom became less vehement, and Mrs. Fitzjames "came to."

"Bless your dear, beautiful face!" exclaimed Lord Goldstable, with a joyous laugh. "Now you look like your own angelical self again! You mean to have me, then, Sophia? You are not going to send me off with a flea in my ear? You will be mine, darling, wont you?"

"Will I be thine, my Edward?" she exclaimed, in an accent of the most thrilling tenderness, her large, liquid, dark eyes fondly fixed upon his. "Oh, what is there that the earth can offer, that I would take in exchange for the dear hope of being thine—thine only, wholly, and for ever?"

"Well said, my beauty!" returned her adorer, giving her a very unceremonious hug. "That is what I call speaking frank and free, and straightforward. And I should like to see the old woman, or the young one either, that would make me give you up!"

"Alas, my Edward! Those words—dear and delightful as they sound to me — prove but too clearly that you are not unconscious of the efforts which will be made to part us. And have you really strength of mind enough —tell me, my too dear Edward — have you really sufficient strength of mind to resist, and

resist effectually, all the intrigues which will be put in action to part us? Remember, the whole set of Harringtons are leagued against us!"

"Not a bit of it, Sophia! There you are out altogether," cried Lord Goldstable. "That old man, Walter, is a trump, I can tell you; and if I wanted anybody's help to enable me to have my own way about marrying you, or anything else, it is to him I should go, sooner than to anybody else, I promise you. So don't you take it into your dear, beautiful head, that my marrying you will be hindered by the Harringtons. By what that fine old fellow says, I don't think that there would be much danger from any of them. But even if there were danger, the dear old man would take care it should not hurt me. So now, Sophy dear, it is all settled between us, isn't it? I never did see any woman that I thought so beautiful as I do you, in the whole course of my life before; and it would be very hard, indeed, now I am come of age, if I might not marry you if I like, and you seeming so fond of me, too, into the bargain."

"Alas! my Edward!" replied the widow, her trembling arms clasping themselves for one moment of irrepressible emotion around his neck.

"Alas! my Edward!" she reiterated, "your generous nature is incapable of suspecting all the mischief that lies hid behind the saintly seeming of those odious Harringtons. I fear, I fear, that you do not know your own danger. Such a set of sly, artful, practised intriguers might undermine the noblest feelings that ever existed in the heart of man!"

"Well, my darling, perhaps you are right about some of them, for I won't deny that they seem to have got scent of my money and title, you know, and all that; but that's no reason why they should have their way instead of my having mine; so don't you put yourself in a fright about it. Besides, as I told you before, the girl's old uncle is a right down good old fellow; and he would not let the others grapple me if they wished it ever so much."

"Grapple you, my Edward! Yes; that's the proper word for it," replied his Sophia, with a groan. "And how, then, can my heart be at rest, when I know that the man my soul adores is the object of their mercenary machinations?"

"Oh, then, my dear, you are altogether mistaken about machinations, as you call it. Whatever they might have got into their heads at one

time, about—about all the stuff my aunt, Lady de Paddington, talked about," said the young man, colouring, as he remembered his blundering statement to Walter, "I am sure and certain that it is all over, and that there is nobody now that will want to stop our marriage in any way—and married we will be, my beauty, as soon as ever we can get everything ready; and the sooner the better, say I."

This satisfactory assurance was accompanied by so tender a caress, that it was some minutes before the agitated Sophia could recover her composure sufficiently to renew the conversation; but at length she said:

"How would it be possible for any woman to doubt such love as yours, my Edward? My heart, at least, is utterly incapable of it! Its own truth teaches it to believe in yours. And yet, dear love, the tenderness of a woman for ever is, and for ever must be, accompanied by a thousand trembling fears, to which the firmer spirit of a man would never listen. But bear with me, dearest Edward! Bear with me, even if you think that I love you too well!"

"Don't you be afraid of that, Sophia,"

replied the young man, very affectionately. "The more you love me, the better I shall be pleased, take my word for that, my dear."

"Oh! how delightful is it to hear you say so, my own—*own* affianced husband!" she replied, with a gentle caress. "But tell me, dearest," she added, earnestly, "tell me everything that has passed between you and these hateful Harringtons. Think what I must have suffered when I overheard your aunt say at that eventful ball: 'That it was quite plain her nephew was caught already; and that it was her young friend, Kate Harrington, who had carried off the prize.' Think what I must have suffered, Edward, at hearing this! and soothe my anxious heart, by telling me exactly everything that passed between you and these dreadful Harringtons, from first to last."

"Well then, Sophia, you shall hear all about it, at least as far as I can remember," he replied. "And all that really signifies was what passed this very morning, and I am quite sure I shall remember that. Quite early this morning, before sunrise, I believe, who should come to my door but the old boy, Walter Harrington himself!"

"Oh, Edward! did that look as if he were not interested?" exclaimed Mrs. Fitzjames, hiding her face upon his shoulder.

"Don't be in a hurry, my dear," replied her lover, "but hear all I have got to say; and don't cry out before you are hurt. Well, Sophy dear, the old fellow knocked up Simpson, my valet, you know, and frightened him as much as he seems to have frightened you; and he, Simpson I mean, got as sulky as the devil. The old gentleman asked to see me, and got for answer that he must come again at twelve. Cool of Mr. Simpson, wasn't it? Well, there was I thinking, of course, that he was coming to insist on my fulfilling my offer. For I don't deny, you know, that I did make an offer; but it was before I got a sight of you, my darling."

"Offer! Nonsense!" exclaimed the indignant beauty. "No people of honour would dream of taking advantage of such idle words."

"Well—but listen now," he resumed, eagerly. "There I sat waiting and waiting, till twelve o'clock, trying to think what it would be best to say to him, and wishing heartily that the whole Harrington race were

at the devil, so that I might be free to throw myself into the arms of a certain beautiful person, that shall be nameless. At last the clock struck, and bang, bang went the knocker, and in walked the old fellow, as punctual as time itself. I can tell you, my dear, that I wished myself anywhere else upon God's earth; but face him I must, and so I did. And would you believe it, my darling, in about five minutes I felt exactly as if I was talking to an old friend, ay, and the best friend too, that I ever had in my life."

"Alas, my own dear love!" exclaimed his Sophia. "Your own noble nature is too far removed from every species of guile and hypocrisy, for you to be capable of suspecting it in others. But oh! my Edward! beware—beware this seeming friendliness! Trust me, sweet friend, that old and artful man hopes to bend you to his purpose, by leading you to forget what that purpose is."

"You are a monstrous clever creature, I am quite sure of that," replied her lover; "but yet, somehow or other, I don't quite think you are right this time, either; and if you will hear me to the end, you will agree

with me in thinking that the fine old fellow does not want me to marry his niece a bit more than you want me to marry her. Just fancy my surprise, my dear, when it came out that his only reason for taking the trouble of paying me a visit at all, was just to make me understand that he particularly wished I would be so obliging as to put all idea of marrying his niece out of my head altogether. What do you think of that, Sophia? I don't feel inclined to quarrel with him for that. Do you? And so I answered him frank and free, that I was quite willing to say no more about it, if he would stand by me to prevent the old big-wig of a father from making a fuss. And he promised that it should all go off as smooth as silk. And in order to make this quite sure, he has also promised to go down to my place, Brandon Abbey, with me, the day after to-morrow; and if he will do that, you know, it is not very likely that they will any of them want to go to law with me afterwards, is it?"

"It certainly does not seem likely," replied the widow, musingly; "but there are many characters so deeply artful as to make it almost

impossible to discover their real meaning. I do not say that this old man is one of them, my dearest Edward, but we ought not to forget that it is possible he may be. But are you really going to leave town, dearest?" she added, her voice trembling with emotion, and her beautiful eyes speaking volumes of tender sorrow. "And going too," she added, almost with a groan, "going too in company with the artful uncle of my dreaded rival."

"I tell you once for all, Sophia, that the old man is a very good old man, and no more artful than a baby. And as to your having a rival, my beauty, that is downright impossible; for in point of beauty, and kindness too, the Harrington girl is no more to be compared to you, than the moon is to the sun. And I don't think I should have thought so overmuch of her beauty, even before I saw you, if my cunning old aunt had not told me such a lot about her being the fashion. But I'll be hanged, Sophia, if it won't be easy for you to be more the fashion than ever she was, if you do but set the right way to work."

"Oh! what is there that I would not do to please you, my beloved Edward?" replied the

fair creature, suddenly pressing her lips to the young man's forehead. "Tell me, only tell me, what you would have me do, and if I fail to do it, then say, dearest Edward, that I love you not."

"And that's what I would not believe, nor say either, for more then you'd believe, perhaps, my beautiful Sophia. But what I want you to do in the way of making yourself as much the fashion as Miss Harrington, would have nothing very disagreeable in it, my darling. You would only have to dress yourself as fine as possible, you know, and have the very finest carriage, and the very finest house, and then get all the very finest people in London to come and dine, and dance, and all the rest of it. There will be no great difficulty in that will there, my treasure? And when we have got to that point, Sophia, we'll soon see whether my fusty musty old aunt, Lady de Paddington, will be able to prove that I am not as much the fashion as if I had married all the Miss Harringtons that ever were born."

CHAPTER VI.

THE conversation had, up to this point, gone on very delightfully, as it seemed, to both parties; for the little picturesque weakness displayed by the lady had passed away too rapidly to produce any serious uneasiness in the gentleman. But now it appeared as if a very painful change was likely to take place, for Mrs. Fitzjames burst into a most vehement paroxysm of weeping.

"My eye! What's the matter now, Sophia?" ejaculated the terrified young man. "If I didn't think we were two of the very happiest lovers that ever sat down side by side together, I'll be hanged, drawn, and quartered! And now, for no reason in the wide world that I

can think of, hocus-pocus, presto, behold! If you ain't sitting there crying like a church spout. What is the matter with you, Sophia?"

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me!" cried the beautiful Niobe, sinking with unspeakable grace on her knees before him. "Edward, beloved Edward, forgive and pity me! Nay, more, my Edward, you must listen to me with patience, or you will never understand the heart you have so completely won."

"Don't cry then, Sophia; only don't cry," said the really agitated young man. "I don't mind your kneeling and looking up at me in that way, if you like it, because it makes you look so excessively beautiful; but I won't have you cry, my beauty, and I don't see why the devil you *should* cry, if it is really true, Sophia, that I have won your dear little affectionate heart—for havn't I just said, out and out, that I wish for nothing in the world so much as to marry you, and make you Lady Goldstable at once, my beautiful darling? Why should you fear anybody then, Sophia? Is not everything settled between us just as safely as if we were married already?"

"Ah! my Edward," replied the fair, trembling creature, as she lent with bewitching weakness on his bosom, "to your strong and manly mind, it may seem so; but to me, alas! the difference between us on this point is most awfully great, my Edward! The idea of this journey is terrible to me, dearest! At your age, dear love, absence is, indeed, a dangerous test of affection—so dangerous, Edward, that my woman's heart sinks and droops before it! Think for one moment—think what would be my feelings if any cause of any kind were to make you forget your poor Sophia! If some fairer face should attract your truant fancy, my beloved Edward, what think you would be my fate were this to happen? Do you, can you, doubt for a single instant that I should die? Oh! do not doubt it, Edward! Commit not such injustice to the heart that loves you so fondly! As surely as my hand now presses yours, my Edward, so surely should that hand lie cold beside me in my early coffin did you cease to love me!"

"My darling angel!" he replied, "I never can, and I never shall, cease to love and doat upon you; upon my life and soul I never shall.

So don't shake and tremble so; and for goodness sake don't cry any more about any such ridiculous idea, for the thing is impossible, and there's an end of it. I never can see anybody's face that's fairer than yours. Your skin's just like alabaster, my darling, and it's as smooth as silk into the bargain. So don't take any more such silly fancies into your head, my dear. Isn't everything settled between us, Sophia?"

"Alas, *no!* my Edward!" replied the widow, with sad and solemn emphasis. "Nothing, nothing is settled. And it is this which terrifies my too fond, too timid heart! If only this were done, if the settling you speak of—settlement, I believe they call it—if this only could be fixed, and made; my poor heart would be comparatively at rest, for then I should know that neither the Harringtons nor any one else could come between us."

"Oh! settlements? Yes, to be sure, my dear. I know people always do make settlements when they are going to be married," said he; "and we can set about making ours just as soon as you please. The sooner the better, darling, I say, for the sooner I am your husband, my beauty, the better I shall be pleased. But how

does one set about it, Sophia? Hang me, if I know anything at all about the matter."

"Why, first, you know, dearest, you send for a lawyer—at least, that is what Colonel Fitzjames did, when he settled. I mean, you know, when he settled everything about his marriage with me," replied the lovely widow, with a childish innocence of tone that was indescribably bewitching.

"And then I presume," returned the gentleman, laughing, "that he binds us over to keep each other. Is that it?"

"Just so," she rejoined, nodding her pretty head and echoing his laugh; "and then you know you will have to say how much you would choose to allow your poor little wife if she was to live longer than you; but that I should never, never do, Edward! No, never, never! If you were to die to-morrow, I do believe in my heart, that I should follow after, quite soon enough to be buried on the same day. I do, indeed, Edward," and here her pretty, nicely-embroidered handkerchief was pressed for a moment to her beautiful eyes.

"I will not have you say so, my darling!" cried the greatly-touched Lord Goldstable, with

an affectionate hug. "I can't bear it, Sophy, I can't indeed; and I won't go on a bit farther about these stupid settlements, if you are to cover up your beautiful eyes so that I can't see them, and I knowing all the time that you are spoiling their brightness by crying like the rain. If you don't kiss me this minute, and promise not to do so any more, I will go away without talking any more about our settlement, or about sending for the lawyer that is to bind us over to one another. And what shall you say to that, dear?"

"I shall say that you are a cruel tyrant," she replied, obeying his command as if too much frightened to disobey him; and then after giving him the kiss, and an enchanting smile besides, just to prove that she had ceased to weep, she suddenly clapped her little hands with the prettiest air of childish glee imaginable, and said: "Now, then, I have obeyed you, and I am quite determined that you shall obey me. What I should best like would be, to command you not to go out of town at all; but I suppose I must not dare to do that, because you have promised that tiresome old man to go with him. But if you must, and will leave me, Edward, you posi-

tively shall not go without leaving something behind to comfort me." This was a sudden thought and a very clever one.

"What can I leave my darling?" said the fond youth, rapturously gazing in her beseeching face, "I would leave you my picture, Sophy, if I had got it. I will have it done for you, though, as soon as ever I come back to town; but it can't be done all in a minute, you know. What can I leave to comfort you when I am gone?"

"I will tell you, dearest," she replied, half-tenderly, half-playfully; "and it will be a comfort, I can promise you; and I shall kiss it, too, but I hope you won't be jealous."

"What do you mean, Sophy?" said his puzzled Lordship. "I never will let you kiss anybody but me—that's flat; so mind your hits, my darling."

"Oh yes, Edward; you will let me kiss what I am talking about, and without being jealous at all; and it will be such a comfort to me. Oh! how very lucky it was that I happened to read that beautiful new novel the other day. I should never have thought of such a thing, if I had not seen it there."

"But what is it, Sophy? Why won't you

tell me at once what it is that you want to kiss?"

"You shall know all about it this very minute," she replied, springing from the sofa with the agility of a young gazelle, and running to a table at the farthest corner of the room, on which stood a miniature writing-desk. "This is what you shall leave me; and this is what I will kiss; and this is what shall comfort me, and keep me alive during your absence, Edward."

And as she spoke, she opened the desk, drew from it a sheet of delicate miniature writing-paper, together with a pen and a tiny ink-bottle.

"Don't move; sit just where you are," she continued; "just where you so tyrannically made me give you a kiss; and write on this bit of paper: 'I hereby solemnly promise to marry you, my dearly beloved Sophia Fitz-james. Witness my hand, GOLDSTABLE.'"

The thing was no sooner asked than done. And how could it be otherwise? For did not the beautiful Sophia kneel down before him as he sat on the sofa? and did she not put the pen into his hand? and did she not spread the

paper smoothly on a little book, and hold it most commodiously before him? She did all this; and he also did the little that was required of him; and having placed the bit of paper in her hands, inscribed with the few words she had dictated, he had the unspeakable satisfaction (as soon as she had sprinkled a little golden sand upon the words, to prevent their being blotted) of seeing her press the paper to her ruby lips, and then tenderly deposit it in her bosom.

"What a fool you are, Sophia, to be sure," said the youth, laughing heartily. "I have heard over and over, that people in love always are fools; but, upon my soul, I think you beat me hollow. Catch me kissing a bit of paper, when I might be kissing you instead. And you seem to have forgotten, you silly thing, what we were talking of before—it was about the settlement, you know; and there was something like sense in that; for I don't believe that we can be married lawfully and properly without that being looked after, and attended to, really, by lawyers and men of business; and to my thinking, my dear, it would be much more to the purpose, for me to send

to my lawyer about that, before I go out of town, instead of giving you a bit of paper to kiss."

"Of course, Edward, I know you are right there," she replied; "but women, poor souls, will be thoughtless and silly sometimes; it is part of their nature, I believe. But certainly, now you remind me of it, I should be very glad that you should send to a lawyer before you go out of town, because they always take a monstrous long time for their work; and I can't say that I want to be parted from you at all longer than is absolutely necessary."

"And how much do you think I should like to be parted from you, darling?" responded the young man, very fondly. "But you must lend me a helping hand, you know; for of all things in the wide world, I believe law is what I know the least about. Upon my life and soul, Sophy, I don't think I ever saw a lawyer above twice in my life. However, I know the name of my own lawyer. It is Barlow, Lincoln's Inn Fields. I'll send to him directly, and he will know how to do everything all right."

"Oh, you dear darling boy!" cried the lady, laughing heartily, "why, it is the *lady's* lawyer,

and not the *gentleman's*, who is always sent to about making marriage settlements. My poor dear father's old friend — mercy on me! I forget his name; but I shall be sure to remember it presently—it is he who has always done all my business for me; and he has always been so friendly and attentive, that I think he would feel quite hurt if I were to be married without sending to him to make the settlements. You had better write at once to your lawyer, my dear Edward, and tell him to confer with mine on the subject. Stay! I will give you another sheet of paper, a little bigger than the last, and you shall sit down at once, to write your instructions, and I will write, as soon as I can recollect his name, to my lawyer, and make him understand that he is to meet your Mr. Barlow."

"Well then, that is all that need be done at present, isn't it?" said the young peer, looking as if they had been talking of business quite long enough, and that he should greatly prefer a little more love-making to any further discussion upon law and lawyers.

"And who's the silly goose now?" returned the widow, again clapping her hands and laugh-

ing heartily. "What do you think they can do together, when they do meet, if you don't tell them?"

"Why, what in the world can I tell them, Sophy dear, that they won't know a great deal better without my telling them anything about it?"

"But they can't know, my darling Edward, exactly how much you may choose to settle upon your wife; that depends entirely upon your own dear self, and your own generous nature. You must tell the lawyers, darling, how much you choose to settle upon me, and then they will take care that it is properly done. I know quite well that the doing that is all they have got to do with it. It is you, Edward, who must say how much you choose it should be."

"And how on earth should I know, Sophy? I don't think I ever heard any human being say a single word about it in the whole course of my life. Do tell me, dear! you must know more about it than I do."

"As to knowing anything about it, Edward, I do assure you, upon my word and honour, that I am as ignorant as the babe unborn; so, for

goodness sake, don't ask me to tell you. All I ever heard about it, was hearing somebody say that the marriage settlement was always made in proportion to the person's income who made it, and that the usual custom was to settle a tenth of the whole income."

"Well, at least, that's knowing something, my darling, and a great deal more than I ever knew before. If I was to follow that rule, Sophia, I should settle eight thousand a-year upon you, for my income, they tell me, is exactly eighty thousand — and a very beautiful fine income it is, everybody tells me. But that's the very reason, isn't it, why I should settle more than a tenth upon my beautiful darling of a wife? and so I will too; I shall settle just double—I shall settle two-tenths upon you, my beauty, instead of one. Nobody shall say that I was a stingy fellow, at the very moment that I was going to marry the most beautiful woman in the whole world. You will love me all the better if I settle two-tenths; won't you, my angel?"

"I am sure I don't know. People, I know, say that women always do love the most generous men the best; but it seems to me,

Edward," she replied, with a very fond caress, "that I love you already as much as it is possible for any woman to love any man."

"God bless you, my angel! you are quite mistaken then, I promise you," he rejoined, with an answering caress, "for I mean to be so generous to you in everything, that you will be obliged to love me ten times more than you do now—you will, indeed, Sophy. And now, let us just put our heads together, my darling, and see if we cannot think of something else that I can do, or settle, as you call it, that may just show the truth of what I say, and prove to the lawyer, and to you, and to everybody else, that I am a great deal more in love with you than ever anybody was in love before; but you must help me about it, Sophia, because I am so stupid that I cannot think of the things. What else shall I write down besides the two-tenths that I have promised you? Do tell me something to write."

Mrs. Fitzjames laughed heartily, showing the beautiful range of her ivory teeth to a greater extent than he had ever beheld them before, and for a moment or two she seemed too much overpowered by the merry convulsion to be able to

answer him, but at length she recovered herself sufficiently to say:

"Oh yes, Edward! I know perfectly well how lovers that are very much in love indeed order their settlements to be made, and you may do so too if you like it, dearest. Though, to tell you the truth, I think the whole business of settlements is nothing but nonsense. However, you are quite right, dear love, to do like other people about it; for if you did not, everybody would be sure to say that it was because I had no large fortune myself."

"And *that* they shall never say," exclaimed Lord Goldstable, with a degree of eagerness which showed that there was a strong touch of generosity in his character, however deficient it might be in other respects. "But tell me," he added, "what you were going to say just now? What is it, my beauty, that the lovers who are very much in love order their lawyers to put in their settlement?"

"Oh, it is something so ridiculous that you will scarcely believe it, and yet, upon my word and honour Edward, it is quite true. They order it to be put in the settlements that the lady is to have—oh, I don't know how much—

but about two thousand a-year, I think, for pin-money. Just fancy, a woman having two thousand a-year to spend in pins."

"Oh, that is too silly, Sophia," replied his Lordship, laughing. "I am sure that you are only making fun now, and that is very wrong of you, my dear, because I really do want to have the settlement all ordered before I go out of town."

"And do you think I want to delay it, Edward?" she replied, with touching tenderness. "Do you think that I wish that we should live asunder longer than is absolutely necessary? Ah, Edward, you little know how fondly you are loved."

"Well then, be serious, Sophia," he replied, taking up the pen and placing a sheet of paper before him: "tell me at once, and without any more joking, exactly what I am to write down upon this paper for the lawyer."

"Indeed, and indeed, Edward, there is no joke in what I said," she replied, in a plaintive voice, and very much as if she were going to weep because he scolded her so harshly. "I do assure you, upon my word and honour, Edward, that I said exactly the real truth.

Every woman, when she is going to be married, unless the man is very, very poor indeed, has a sum of money settled on her for clothing herself; and there is nothing ridiculous in that, you know. It is only because the lawyers will call it pin-money, that it was so very absurd. There is nothing foolish in a woman having money to pay for her dresses, is there, dear? You would not like that your wife should go without dresses, I am quite sure of that."

"I think not, indeed," replied his Lordship, evidently disgusted at the bare idea of such barbarity. "Pin-money, two thousand a-year?" he added, interrogatively. "That was what you said, wasn't it, dearest?"

"Yes," she replied, opening the volume which lay on the sofa with an air of the most lazy indifference. "That is what one or two of my friends have had named for that purpose in the settlements. But I suspect that it is only a mere form after all."

"At any rate I won't leave it out, dearest, if it was only because of what you said just now about lovers that were very much in love. And where was there ever a lover more in love

than I am, I should like to know? No, no, my dear, neither the lawyers nor any one else shall ever misdoubt me on that point."

The only reply which suggested itself to Mrs. Fitzjames, in return for this loving assurance was another kiss, rather more tender than any of those which had preceded it; and when this had been performed, the instructions were given with a pretty air of much gravity by the lady, and written down with a very painstaking degree of real gravity by the gentleman.

And this being achieved, a few more playful caresses followed, in the midst of which the discreet Sophia declared that it was high time he should go, for that if he stayed any longer, the servants would be sure to begin talking about the extraordinary length of his visit.

"And that won't do, my dear Lord," she said, with an air of almost solemn gravity. "I never have been talked of yet, Edward, and I never will."

"I should like to hear anybody dare to say a word against you. You should see if I would not knock 'em down as flat as flounders in no time," rejoined the young man. "However, my darling, if you tell me I must go, go I will,

just to prove that I don't mean to contradict you in anything. So good-by, dearest. Of course, I shall pay you another visit to-morrow, so take care that you are not gadding, my beauty. One kiss more, Sophy, and then good-by, my own dear beautiful wife."

"Good-by, Edward," returned the fair creature, very plaintively. "Good-by."

But while she said this, she still held his hand very firmly clasped in hers.

"Dear little soul! you don't like to part with me, do you, my darling? Tell me before I go, Sophia, if there is anything I can do for you? Can I be useful to you in any way?" said the enamoured youth, looking very much as if he had not the courage to depart.

The widow raised her delicate hands, and for a minute or two stood still, her face concealed behind them.

"What is the matter, darling?" said her lover, endeavouring to remove the barrier which hid the features he so greatly loved to look upon. "You are not got to crying again, are you? I positively will not let you cry, Sophy, for I can't bear it."

"No, Edward, no; I am not crying, I

should be very foolish to cry when I know that the man I love, loves me; but I was hiding my face that I might have time to think, and make up my mind whether it would be right or wrong to tell you a secret that I have got heavy upon my heart, and which gives me a good deal of uneasiness."

"Tell me what it is this very moment, my darling angel!" he exclaimed, in an accent of very true affection. "Think what a delight it would be to me, if I could help you out of your trouble."

"But I am afraid that it will appear as if I was so very careless, and such a very bad manager. But indeed, dearest Edward, it was a series of unlucky accidents, and no fault of mine, that occasioned it," she replied, with a pretty air of timid embarrassment, that touched him to the very heart.

"You don't mean that you are afraid of me, my beautiful darling!" he exclaimed, throwing his arms fondly round her, and pressing her trembling but unresisting form to his heart. "What can I say to you, Sophy, to make you know how dearly I love you?"

"I do know it, Edward," she replied, gently

returning his caresses; "indeed I do, and I should not be worthy of your love if I doubted it. But I don't feel quite certain that it is right to trouble you with all my troubles. I have been very cruelly robbed, dearest Edward, by a servant whom I trusted, and the consequence is, that at this moment I am greatly in distress for money."

"Oh, Sophy! Sophy!" he vehemently replied, "what a silly creature you must be to fancy it would be more right to hide such a thing from me, than to tell me of it! Do you really think, you naughty little goose, that it would be better for either of us that you should go on positively suffering for want of a little money, instead of letting me have the delight of giving you some? Tell me how much I shall give you, my beauty. I have got my chequebook in my pocket, because I wanted to pay my tailor's bill to-day, before going out of town, you know, that he might not think I was running away; and here is the pen and ink, darling, all ready. Tell me how much you want, you beautiful creature, and let it be as much as it will, I promise to give it, provided

you will promise to give me a kiss of your own accord the moment after."

"Dearest Edward, if a kiss be indeed a token of love, I should not find it very easy to refuse it."

"Dove! Then that's a bargain!" cried the youth, gaily seizing the pen with his right hand, and extracting his cheque-book from his pocket with his left. "Now then, pretty one, how much?"

"I am half afraid to tell you," she replied, "I am, indeed! I could not bear that you should fancy me thoughtless or extravagant; but the truth is, Edward, that less than five hundred pounds would not suffice to relieve me from my present embarrassment."

Lord Goldstable said nothing, but wrote the cheque with as much rapidity as any man could be expected to write who used a pen as rarely as his Lordship; and when he had fairly filled up the cheque, and duly signed his name thereto, he approached the lady, and gazing at her bright and curious eyes, into which she instantly threw a look of tender softness that in some degree tempered the eagerness of their glance, he said:

"Fair play is no robbery, my darling. You are to give me, of your own free will, without my taking it, one dear, beautiful kiss for five hundred pounds; and if you act fair, and no cheating, you will let me take five more on my side for the other five hundred pounds, for I have drawn for a thousand, my sweet one! What do you say, is it a bargain?"

"Oh, Edward! what can I say to you?" she exclaimed, throwing her arms very frankly round his neck, while she performed her part of the compact.

"Now then, my dear, it's my turn!" he gaily replied; and not having met with any absolutely unconquerable resistance, his part of it was accomplished likewise. The precious manuscript was playfully thrust into her hand, and the lovers parted, equally, perhaps, enchanted with each other.

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Fitzjames, notwithstanding her rapidly-increasing attachment to, and admiration of, her young lover, was decidedly very glad when she heard the house-door close behind him. She was, in fact, exceedingly fatigued: and no wonder. She had achieved much, and very important business, and this is rarely or never done without some feeling approaching to fatigue succeeding. As soon as this welcome sound had greeted her ears, she rang the bell, and then she threw herself at full length upon the sofa, two very well-stuffed cushions under her head, and Lord Goldstable's draft for a thousand pounds in her hand; so that, although decidedly fatigued, she felt on the whole very

comfortable. The maid who answered the bell was her own personal attendant, and, in fact, the only servant of any kind who belonged to her. She was a French girl, and clever in many ways; and had Mrs. Fitzjames been describing her character, she would have ascribed to her, among many other good gifts, all the rare qualities that constitute a perfectly confidential servant. Nevertheless, the beautiful Sophia placed the hand which still held the precious draft, very snugly out of sight behind her back, and there let it remain as long as the interview lasted.

"I know not what is the matter with me, dear Lisette," she said; "but I am dreadfully tired and languid. Do let me have a cup of coffee. I left more than a cup at breakfast: and bring me a bit of toast with it. And don't let any one in, for your life."

To all which the intelligent hand-maiden promised obedience; and after curiously gazing at her beautiful mistress, for about half a minute after she had ceased speaking, she made her exit, gently closing the door after her, and very certain that she should hear something or other about the young visitor and his long

visit, as soon as her lady had refreshed her spirits by the coffee and toast.

Far, however, was the acute waiting-maid from guessing the immense importance of the news that the lady was now very truly and literally too tired to tell. Had she been a little better informed, she would not have blundered so egregiously in the performance of her duty, as she did; and in that case the events which followed might have been very dissimilar to what they were.

The widow had again thrown her languid limbs upon the sofa, and was enjoying, with eyes half closed, the almost dreamy but most delicious consciousness, that she still clasped within her little hand a cheque for one thousand pounds, when just about the moment that the coffee and toast were expected, the door of the room was again opened by Lisette, who, instead of presenting a tray, pronounced with great distinctness the words, "Captain Fowler."

The effect produced by this announcement on Mrs. Fitzjames was very vehement, and certainly at the moment extremely startling and unaccountable to the gentleman who produced it. No sooner had his name reached her ears, than suddenly

starting, with a vigorous spring, from her recumbent position, and darting with the rapidity of lightning across the room, she cleared, as it seemed with one bound, the space between the sofa and the table on which Lord Goldstable had deposited the instructions she had dictated for his lawyer, and while with one hand she thrust this into her pocket, she hastily placed the cheque she still held in the other, into her bosom.

This marvellous display of agility sufficed to enable her to secure possession of the papers; but not without being perceived by the tall personage who still stood, startled into silence, as it seemed, by the vivàcity of her movements, immediately behind the servant who had announced him. As soon, however, as the flying figure of the lady had ceased to flit before his eyes, and had resumed its position on the sofa, the tall gentleman made a step in advance, whereupon Lisette disappeared; and then the stranger, before he uttered any salutation whatever, turned again towards the door, and with his own hand effectually closed it—an operation which Lisette was rather apt to leave imperfectly performed. This being done, he turned again, and drew near the lady.

He was, though very tall, a very well-built man, of some five and forty years of age, or so. His upright figure was clothed in a military-looking blue frock-coat, single-breasted, and buttoned to the chin. Though a good deal approaching towards being bald, he would probably still have been deemed a very remarkably handsome man by all those persons, whether male or female, who look at the form of a human being, precisely as they would at that of a horse, and who are wholly unable to see or feel the beauty, or absence of beauty, which the inner man so mysteriously and so infallibly impresses on the outward casing. Despite his handsome features, any one who was endowed with the power of seeing more in the human face divine than its mere form, would have pronounced Captain Fowler to be a singularly ill-looking person.

And yet the most skilful and practised physiognomist might have failed to read Captain Fowler aright, had the said Captain's eyes been hidden from their scrutiny. His smiling, well-formed mouth, might have been thought to express only good humour and a kind temper. But the eye rarely succeeds in lying; and there was a cold, doubtful, sinister

expression in his, joined to a sort of calm audacity, which had no mixture of frankness in its boldness, which produced an effect inexpressibly repulsive.

For the rest, Captain Fowler might perhaps have been mistaken for a gentleman as long as he remained silent, had it not been for a peculiar look of smart "seediness" about his habiliments totally different from the impoverished shabbiness of a gentleman under any circumstances.

Mrs. Fitzjames having performed the feat of activity which has been above described, had resumed her place on the sofa; but her whole attitude and bearing were changed to a degree which seemed to have converted her into a totally different person from what she had appeared ten minutes before. She positively, and without the slightest exaggeration, looked ten years older. Her features no longer expressed softness, delicacy, or refinement of any kind. Her aspect was now that of determined endurance, and settled, obstinate firmness of purpose. She had evidently made up her mind as to the manner in which she intended to act under existing circumstances, and it was evident also, that she expected, and was resolved to en-

dure a sharp struggle. She sat with one knee crossed over the other, and her hands firmly clasped round the upper one. Her head was somewhat bent down, but not so her eyes, which seemed to watch furtively every movement of the new-comer.

"I am quite delighted to observe, my dear, that you possess anything which you think of sufficient value to justify so much anxiety, and so much activity to remove it out of—out of harm's way," said Captain Fowler, demurely, as he majestically marched up to the fireplace, and took his stand on the rug before it, by which means he found himself exactly opposite the lady.

"There may be secrets, Fowler, which I have no wish to entrust to your discretion, without there being anything of value in question," she very quietly replied.

"Scarcely so, my fair Sophy, at this time of day," was his answer. "Time has been, certainly," he continued, "when something of this sort might have been the case. But after all that has come and gone between you and me, my fair friend, I am inclined to think that there is nothing you would be so very anxious to

keep from my cognizance save and except *cash*, my charming Sophia, or something thereunto conducive. Pray observe, and be grateful for it, how highly, with that one trifling exception, I rate your connubial confidence in the man of your choice, my dear Mrs. Fowler."

"Idiot!" she exclaimed with a grimace indicative of the most profound contempt. "I know of no folly so disgusting as a worn-out jest."

"Did you know how, beyond all else on earth, the dear and solemn subject to which you allude as a jest, is precious to me, my divine Sophia, you never would venture to use so peculiarly inappropriate a phrase. A jest, my love? How is it possible that you can think I consider as a jest, that dear, that darling, that inestimable privilege which I have enjoyed so long? Oh no, you cannot think it! You call me idiot, now; but what would you call me if your cruel suspicion—that I could cease to consider you as my wife—were just? It is you who jest, Sophia."

"Let me advise you, Captain Fowler, not to amuse yourself by these most ridiculous airs at a moment when my most important interests

are at stake. Not content with endangering every hope I have, by showing yourself here at all, you must needs shout out words which, if heard, must inevitably destroy me, in a tone loud enough to be audible by every one in the house." And then suddenly sinking her own voice to a low whisper, she added: "You know not what you do, madman! you know not what you risk!"

"Risk, child? Bless your little tender heart, I risk nothing. You know as well as I do, that my calling you Mrs. Fowler has, many a time, been the best protection I could give you against being called something worse. No nonsense, if you please, Sophia—no nonsense, and no airs. If you have any good news to tell me, let me hear it; and you know, perfectly well, that I am not the sort of man likely to be in your way —that is to say, upon proper conditions, you know; but we must share and share alike remember. I am devilish hard up, I can tell you, and if I were not, I should not be prowling about to find you out. But circumstances have made it inconvenient for me not to stay in Paris any longer, just at present; so here I am again at your feet, my beauty, and

if you have really anything hopeful to communicate, pray let me hear it."

"Captain Fowler!" returned Mrs. Fitzjames, knitting her brows into a very threatening frown, "you know not what would be lost to me, nor what would be lost to you either, Sir, were the inmates of this house to overhear you when you thus absurdly and madly address me by your own name!"

"Go on, my dear love; I am really listening to you with intense interest. Go on, Sophia! What you might lose I can, perhaps, conceive, by a vigorous exertion of my invention, though I do not as yet see how, or where; but as to what I should lose, I profess that I have not the very slightest idea. You are permitting yourself, very foolishly, I fear, to lose sight of that part of the subject. Now, once for all, my very dear wife, for such you were once most happy to be called, and shall be so called still, if it suits my convenience, let us understand one another, as all such good and well-matched couples should. You evidently think it desirable, and no doubt for admirably good reasons, to sink, blink, forget and deny all remembrance of the blissful period during which we enjoyed an interval of such supreme felicity at Passy.

I, on the contrary, shall never sink, blink, forget or deny the remembrance of so extremely agreeable a portion of my existence. It is, no doubt, possible that there may now be reasons for your denying that you ever were called Mrs. Fowler, as powerful as there were then for declaring that it would have been a cruel outrage to call you anything else. Well, my dear, if that be the case, you have only to explain the matter to me, in order to make me conform to your wishes in every particular, provided, you know, that I could see my own benefit in it, as well as yours. You know me far too well to suspect that I should be so unreasonable as to make any objection to what I should, of course, in that case consider as a perfectly rational line of conduct."

"Have you not sufficient common sense to perceive the benefit of breaking a tie which no longer holds either, but which still may gall both?" returned Mrs. Fitzjames, with very solemn earnestness. "Would it be no benefit to you to be rid for ever of a galling entanglement which, like the clutch of some desperate drowning wretch, may effectually frustrate your own struggling efforts to swim?"

"But you seem to forget, my sweet, that it

is I who am the desperate drowning wretch," said the Captain, with a bitter laugh; "and the species of discretion to which you allude never, I believe, arises with the individual so circumstanced, whatever it may do in the case of his more desperate associate. Keep this in mind, will you, dearest? for the forgetting it will infallibly lead you to draw false conclusions."

"You are very idly playing with words, Captain Fowler," she replied. "The *fact*, the important *truth* which I wish, for both our sakes, to point out to you is, that there can be no advantage to either of us in remembering or alluding to the imprudent connection which we were weak enough to form when we were some years younger, and many degrees less experienced, than, I presume, we both are at present."

"Well, Sophia, you need be under no alarm from fearing any desperately imprudent fondness on my part. I will not attempt to deny, my dear, that despite these still unfaded charms, which some five long years ago so completely subjugated my too tender heart, I will not, I say, pretend to deny that it is, *par le temps qui court*, considerably more convenient to me to be without you. I own it candidly; and this

of itself ought to convince you of my unvarnished sincerity. Nevertheless, I am still disposed to consider the terms on which we have lived together as forming a tie that may, by possibility, be very advantageous to me. It constitutes a sort of partnership, you see, which gives me a fair claim to share in whatever advantages you may derive from dropping all allusion to it. Observe, my dear, that you cannot realize these advantages of oblivion, without my being a consenting party, and I am by no means disposed to abandon the vantage-ground which this gives me, without a fair share of the benefit to be derived from my silence and discretion. Do you comprehend me, my dear Mrs. Fowler?"

"Oh, very clearly, Captain Fowler," replied the lady, quietly. "For a long time past you have made yourself quite well understood, and well known to me. I only wish, Sir, I had always known you as well."

"I, too, think that our connection, formed, too, so broadly in the face of day, was a very imprudent one, and that we should both of us, probably, have been better off, if we had never happened to fall in love with each other. To

say the least of it, we must confess that it was a very great imprudence; I too, having an old wife alive at the time in Brussels. But all these moralizings, my dear, though they may sometimes form a very agreeable little domestic pastime, will not help us at all forward in the solution of the present question. Make an effort, Sophia dear: do now, for once and a way, make an effort to be frank and honest. It will save you time and trouble, depend upon it, though I am aware that it may be inconsistent with your principles."

The lady looked at him earnestly, as if reading the strong large characters in which his soul was written in his face, and she gave a minute or two to meditation, after which she replied very quietly:

"I am sure I have no desire to be otherwise, Captain Fowler, especially as such frankness will, I doubt not, convince you of the prudence of keeping yourself at a convenient distance henceforward and for ever from my whereabouts. Do you see that letter yonder? That paper I mean, that is lying unfolded there, on my writing-desk. Have the goodness to give yourself the trouble of reading it."

The obedient Captain lost no time in complying with this request. On the contrary, it was with a very rapid stride that he transformed his person to the other side of the room, and seizing upon Lord Goldstable's letter of instructions to Mr. Barlow, read it with every possible appearance of interest, from beginning to end. He then replaced it on the desk, and stood profoundly silent, but evidently in wide-awake meditation for a minute or two. At length he said:

"I do believe, Sophy, that you will force me to confess, after all, that I might have done worse then devote myself to you as faithfully as I have done—devil's imp, as I have often thought you. But it is beyond all question, a very fine thing to be closely connected, either as father-in-law, or anything else, to the three-tailed portion of the human race. Eighty thousand a-year. Upon my life, Sophy, you seem to have driven your pigs—I beg pardon, my dear, your smiles I mean—to a famously good market at last. Well, Sophy, for my part, I say *done* to my share of the bargain. I would not permit my attachment, overpowering as it is, to interfere with your present admirable

scheme for the world. I am content to sink our connexion in eternal oblivion; I am quite ready to march off, and evacuate the place to this Lord Goldcalf, or whatever his name may be. Bag and baggage I'll be off, my dear, for a proper and sufficient consideration. You understand me, my fair friend? I am sure you do. I have always observed in you an extraordinary degree of intelligence, on all points connected with what is vulgarly called the main chance. All we have to do, therefore, is to take care before we part that no mistake is likely to arise between us, respecting the amount of the consideration which I am to receive for consenting to absent myself for ever from the light of my eyes, and the joy of my heart. If you will do the thing handsomely, Sophy, I will never come near you, and especially never near enough, my dear, to eat or drink cup or platter of your catering. Eh! upon my soul, my beauty, it makes me shiver to think how delighted you would be to see me fairly on the road to kingdom come. But never mind, my dear, don't look cross. Looking daggers will do no good, you know."

"If I were to pay you for your absence,

Fowler, in proportion to the disgust your presence causes me, you would be rich enough," replied the lady. "But go, only go, and go far enough, and never doubt that I will make it worth your while to stay away. Cannot you guess, Sir, how I loathe the sight of you?"

"Oh, dear, yes; perfectly, my dear, perfectly. I can quite enter into your feelings, and fully sympathise in them. But before this blissful going is performed, I have one or two rather important observations to make, which are indeed absolutely essential to a right understanding between us of the matter in hand. The first is, that in determining the amount of the provision you intend to make for the fond lover, who thus generously consents to resign you to another, it will be necessary for you to lose your calculations, not so much on what it might seem to be worth my while to take in order to keep me silent, as what it would be worth your while to give, to reward that precious silence. For you will do wisely to remember, Madam," and here, for the first time since the colloquy began, his manner changed from sneering raillery, to savage intensity of earnestness; "you will do wisely to

remember, that as you have bestowed yourself upon me, my power over you in such a case as this is absolute, and pretty nearly unlimited. Therefore, we must share this fool's wealth together, fairly and evenly; or, by Heaven, we will sink together into the abyss which the slightest disclosure of by-gone facts on my part would cause to open before us!"

In reply to this, the only answer he received was a slight inclination of the head from Mrs. Fitzjames.

"That is enough," said he, resuming his former free and easy manner. "I am, indeed, aware that you know me well enough to make any further observations on the subject quite needless; now then, fair Sophy, I have only to remark, that though these golden prospects are very charming, and highly satisfactory in every way, yet, nevertheless, they are not available assets for the payment of my dinner, and so forth, to-day; and this brings me back to the subject from which we started, and which I have by no means lost sight of, namely, the bit of paper, my dear, (it was a cheque, if my eyes did not greatly deceive me), which you made

such very vehement efforts to conceal when I came in."

"And from whom do you think it was likely that I should receive a cheque?" she replied, with a weak attempt at evasion, which she herself knew was hopeless.

"From whom, my dear? why from your noble lover, to be sure; from your glorious golden calf, Sophy! The story tells itself, and a very amusing one it is. His soft Lordship having written the very interesting letter which I have just read, my Sophia—I beg pardon, my *ci-devant* Sophia, I mean—would have acted in a manner totally unworthy of herself had she suffered him to depart without a little gentle bleeding; I would have bet two to one upon the chance of this, even if I had not seen the cheque. Come, my dear, hand it over!"

"It is true, Captain Fowler," she replied, "that I did get a draft from him for twenty pounds to pay my lodgings here; and you shall have half of it, Sir—I will send it to be cashed immediately," and as she spoke she rose from the sofa, and with a very quiet movement approached the door.

Her smiling companion suffered her to proceed without interruption for a step or two, and then, with one long stride, overtaking her, he very politely took her hand, and having performed a courtly bow, led her back to her seat.

"It was well tried, Sophia. Very well tried. But I suspect, my pretty one, that your former lover is not so easy to deal with as your present one. Just lay your fair hand upon your tender heart, sweet Sophy, and draw forth the cheque that is nestling there! But do it at once, if you please, and do it quietly, there's a good girl! In which case, I swear I will take only half; but if you make any bother about it, Sophy, upon my soul I will take the whole."

The unfortunate lady knew him too well to doubt his keeping his word, and the cheque for one thousand pounds was drawn forth, and placed in his hands.

"A thousand pounds, by all that's holy!" exclaimed the ruffian, greedily clutching it. "But, upon my life, I envy you the pleasure of plucking such a pigeon as this. It positively ought to count as at least ten per cent. upon every hundred we divide. But come, don't look frightened! Fair play's a jewel! Honour

bright, my dear, you shall have half of it; if it was only to teach you the principle of fair *half-and-half* division for the future. And really, Sophia, you need not look blue about it. If ever any woman could afford to let her lord and master go shares, it is you, Sophia; for it needs no conjuror to tell one that you will find it easy enough to make another pull on the same bank, and without danger of breaking it either."

"But it may stop payment, Sir; an event extremely likely to happen, if it has to guard against a claimant as ravenous as yourself," replied the lady, bitterly.

"Not a bit of it, Sophy," was the rejoinder, "as long as you look as beautiful as your virtuous indignation makes you look at this moment, the bank of Gold-calf will not stop payment. And now, good-by, my dear. I will call on you some time to-morrow, in order honourably to pay over to you your share of the dividend; and I hope I shall find you disengaged. But do not stand upon ceremony. If you are occupied, I can call again. Good-by."

The overpowered Sophia spake not a word in reply; and thus they parted.

CHAPTER VIII.

If the first of Mrs. Fitzjames' visitors had left her food for meditation of a nature that appeared of the greatest possible importance, the apparition of the second awakened and left with her thoughts so heavy, in their terrible consequences, as to make all else appear too light and too uncertain to be any longer dwelt upon as a grave reality. The train of thought which Lord Goldstable had left behind him, had been all *couleur de rose;* whereas, that which succeeded the departure of Captain Fowler, might be said to have palled itself in the very dimmest smoke of hell, so dismally dark did it appear to her.

For the man had uttered no vain boast, when

he said that she knew him well enough to be certain that he would act up to all he threatened. She had become fully awake to the tremendous peril which had now beset all her brightest hopes; yet still she thought that if she could but bribe him to keep off and remain quiet till the marriage was achieved, she might afterwards, in a great degree, defy him.

It was certain that he must for ever, as long as life was left him, command the power of blasting her reputation; he might, too, there could be no doubt of it, have power to cause a separation between herself and her future husband; but, even so, she would still be mistress of wealth far, far beyond all she had ever dreamed of possessing. Nor did she yet quite lose sight of the rainbow brightness of the tints in which her destiny might still be traced, could she but succeed in bribing her tyrant to lasting silence.

More than once during the dreadfully painful hour of meditation which succeeded his departure, did she feel inclined to think she had been wrong in trusting to him the secret of her splendid hopes; yet, on the other hand, she felt that it would have been almost impossible for

the marriage to have actually taken place without his hearing of it; and she felt also that, even if he had not arrived at so critical a moment, her misery from his approach would only have been delayed till rumour, or a newspaper, had announced to him that she was in a position which might make it worth his while to persecute her.

But Mrs. Fitzjames was much too clever a woman to waste in profitless meditation, moments which might be more advantageously employed in action. She sat quietly on the seat where the detested Captain Fowler had left her, just long enough to contemplate the actual position in which she was placed, from every point of view at which her active sagacity could place her; and the result of this was, that, instead of wasting another moment in lamenting the ill-timed re-appearance of her ruffian lover, or in mourning over the robbery he had perpetrated, she suddenly, but firmly, resolved to hurry forward by every possible device the irrevocable ceremony which should make her Lady Goldstable, let the subsequent dangers which might threaten the tranquillity of her wedded life be what they might.

"Once his wife," she murmured, "and he cannot divorce me for anything that happened before I became so. I am lawyer enough to know that. And my heart being very considerably less tender than it has been in days of yore, I shall continue to be his wife as long as we both shall live; unless, indeed, accident and my fair face should lead me within reach of some position that I might like better. But, at any rate, I may soothe myself with the comfortable assurance that no tender weakness on my part towards Captain Fowler will endanger the tranquillity of my noble nuptials."

Having reached this point, she rose, in order immediately and literally, without a moment's delay, to put into execution a scheme which had suggested itself to her bold and fertile imagination, even before Lord Goldstable had left. The project was a daring one, being no less than making a visit to Lady de Paddington, and trying the power of her winning ways in converting that highly respectable old noblewoman from a furious enemy into a useful ally.

The move was certainly a very bold one, and required no small portion of courage and self-

confidence. But in neither was Mrs. Fitzjames deficient. Moreover, she enjoyed the advantage of having heard some of the peculiarities of her Ladyship's character, discussed by a woman who now carried on the business of buying and selling second-hand dresses, but who had formerly lived with Lady de Paddington as her maid. From this source, she had learned that the old lady was both poor and avaricious, and well disposed either to save or to make money by every opportunity that came in her way. On this hint she determined to act; and the result proved that she had neither blundered concerning the information she had obtained, nor in the confidence with which she trusted to her own talents for making the most of it.

If the reader will take the trouble of following the lovely widow across Piccadilly, he will soon find himself at the door of Lady de Paddington's aristocratic, but gloomy old mansion; and when he has learned how she sped when she got there, he may be tempted to give her credit for some cleverness.

To the gruff answer of "not at home," which was flung to the walking visitor by Lady de Paddington's servant, with about as much

civility as he would have thrown a bone to a dog, the lady replied by drawing from her pocket a little note, which she extended to him with one hand, while between the finger and thumb of the other she held a golden sovereign very visibly displayed.

"If you will deliver this note to your mistress, Sir, this sovereign is yours," she said. "It is very important to me that I should see her, and if you will give her this note, I think it very likely that she may wish to see me as much as I wish to see her."

"Well! I don't know, Ma'am, how that may be; but I'll do my best," returned the man, extending his hand, into which both note and sovereign were given. "If you will please to walk in for a minute, I will see what I can do."

And on receiving this answer, the beautiful Mrs. Fitzjames walked in, perfectly well contented to take her station at the bottom of the stairs, to await the result of her experiment.

Lady de Paddington, meanwhile, received the note, and read as follows, with mingled indignation and astonishment:

"Mrs. Fitzjames presents her compliments to Lady de Paddington," it began.

"To me! the creature dares to present her impertinent compliments to me!" muttered the old lady, between her teeth; and for a moment she felt exceedingly disposed to tear the document to atoms before the eyes of the messenger, by way of enabling him to deliver a fitting reply to it.

But a strong feeling of curiosity changed her head and checked her pride. And so she read on:—"And has taken the liberty of calling on her, for the purpose of communicating some important intelligence which it may be advantageous to Lady de Paddington to hear. Should this statement be proved erroneous, Lady de Paddington may resent the step now taken, by causing Mrs. Fitzjames to leave her house immediately. All that her Ladyship can lose therefore, by admitting her, is a minute or two of time. What she may gain by it, may be less easily stated, and may be more worth inquiring about."

"That's true; let who will say it," was the next phrase muttered; and after the silent meditation of about a minute, the old lady dismissed the man by saying: "Show the person up."

She then seated herself with an air of very imposing dignity in the middle of a large sofa; and in this attitude awaited the entrance of her mysterious visitor.

Mrs. Fitzjames, however, entered her magnificent presence with every appearance of the most perfect ease; and on receiving, in return for her graceful courtesy, a slight movement of the head, which seemed to indicate that she was to place herself on a chair which stood on the opposite side of the table, she obeyed it, and sat down.

"It was in reference to your nephew, Lord Goldstable, that I wished to speak to you, Lady de Paddington," said she, gently and quietly.

"And may I ask to be informed, Madam, what it is possible you can have to say to *me* on such a subject?" said the noble and indignant dowager. "And how can all and everything you can say concerning it, justify the language of your note? unless, indeed, it may be that, conscious of the wickedness of which you have been gulity, by enticing this poor weak young man away from his proper friends and connexions, you have come here to promise that you will see him no more."

Mrs. Fitzjames smiled, and really looked excessively pretty as she did so.

"No, Lady de Paddington," she replied, "that is not exactly the object of my visit. On the contrary, I am come expressly to inform you—and you are the first person to whom I have considered it as my duty to communicate the fact—that I am about to be married to Lord Goldstable immediately."

"Audacious woman!" screamed Lady de Paddington. "And do you really dream that such a marriage is possible? And not only that, but you have the inconceivable effrontery of coming here to tell me of it as something greatly to my advantage!"

"I did not mean, Lady de Paddington, that it would be for your advantage that I should marry Lord Goldstable," replied the quiet, self-possessed Mrs. Fitzjames, "though I have great pleasure in thinking that eventually it may turn out to be so. But what I meant in the present instance was, that it might be for your advantage that you should be made aware of the fact that he is about to contract such an alliance."

"Heaven grant me patience!" exclaimed the old lady, passionately. "What do you mean,

young woman, by making such an outrageous statement? Are you not aware that Lord Goldstable is on the very eve of marriage with Miss Harrington?"

"I do assure you, Madam," replied Mrs. Fitzjames, gently, "I do assure you, that he has already broken off that engagement at once, and for ever. It will save you much trouble and inconvenience, dear lady, if you will receive this statement as being true—for true it is, you may depend upon it."

"It is very possible he may have told you so, and it is very possible that you may have been fool enough to believe him. But an engagement of this kind, as the infatuated boy will find to his cost, is not so easily got rid of. What does he suppose her family will say to such conduct?"

"He has already the satisfaction of knowing, Lady de Paddington, that the most influential individual of the Harrington family perfectly approves his withdrawing his proposals," returned Mrs. Fitzjames, with the air of a person perfectly well acquainted with all the particulars of the affair of which she was speaking.

"What! the vulgar savage, I suppose, who

has possession of the family acres? He is a party in your plot, is he?" returned the old lady, scornfully.

"I have not the slightest acquaintance, Lady de Paddington, with the person to whom you allude; nor have I any reason to believe that he has been made acquainted with Lord Goldstable's engagement to me," replied the widow, with the most philosophical composure of manner, "nor does it appear to me that it can be a matter of any interest to him. That the union which had been proposed between your nephew and his niece was so, can surprise no one; for I know that it is said she will be his heiress. The young lady's family—that is, her father, I believe,—threatened to bring an action against poor dear Edward for breach of promise. But old Mr. Harrington appears to be a more reasonable person, and has set Edward's mind quite at ease on that subject."

Lady de Paddington stared at her, and listened to her with equal astonishment and indignation. The cool effrontery of the beautiful widow seemed so completely to pass her comprehension, as to leave her in doubt as to what her actual position was, and how she

ought to be treated. After a pause, which Mrs. Fitzjames interpreted greatly to her own satisfaction, the old lady said, but with considerably less vehemence of manner:

"Go on, Ma'am, if you please: I beg that I may hear the whole of your statement."

"You have heard it already, Lady de Paddington," replied the unblushing widow, in the gentlest and most lady-like accents imaginable, "and it really will be better for you to understand at once that Lord Goldstable and myself are about to be married, and that you will find it wholly out of your power to prevent it. You call your nephew a weak young man; it is possible he may be so. You have called me an audacious woman; this, too, may possibly approach the truth—that is to say, that it is possible I may be a person not easily daunted or turned away from any resolution I may have formed. If you will add to the information afforded by these acknowledged facts, a careful consideration of this document—which is a copy that I have just made of Lord Goldstable's instructions to his lawyer respecting the settlement he is about to make on me—I think you will no longer doubt the truth of the

statement which I have had the honour to make to you."

"And if I were to believe it, Ma'am?" returned the old lady, receiving the paper, and frowning very majestically as she read it by the aid of her spectacles from beginning to end. "What do you expect me to say to you, even if I do believe it?"

"That must depend entirely, Madam, upon the degree of influence which your good sense may have upon your temper," replied the impassible widow. "If you permit your sober judgment to dictate to you, I think that you will very soon be brought to acknowledge that, even if you had the power of making Lord Goldstable marry Miss Harrington instead of marrying me, it would be greatly more for your own interest that he should become my husband than hers. Examine the question dispassionately, Lady de Paddington," continued the beautiful widow, in the clear, distinct accents of deliberative wisdom, "examine the question dispassionately, and I am greatly mistaken if you do not arrive at the conclusion that it would be much more for your advantage that your nephew should marry me than Miss

Harrington. Depend upon it that the family of Miss Harrington would all claim, and no doubt enjoy, a large share in the profitable and agreeable duty of guiding and influencing a weak, easy-tempered young man, possessed of eighty thousand a-year. I have no family connexions of any sort to interfere with that influence, which you might so easily and beneficially exercise. Standing alone in the world as I do, and have done since the death of my ever-lamented husband, Colonel Fitzjames, and almost perfectly a stranger as I am in London, it will be of most material advantage to me, as Lady Goldstable, to have the immense benefit of your Ladyship's countenance, advice, and protection. And I scarcely need point out to you," she added, in a sort of earnest whisper, "that I shall be in a situation to repay, with very solid value, all such support and assistance. Remember, too, while it is yet time, that by attempting to force him into marrying Miss Harrington, you will make your greatly irritated nephew your enemy for life; while by countenancing me, who, in the eye of the world, may seem really benefitted by your doing so, you will secure his gratitude

and affection to the end of your days. And if, in addition to those considerations, you keep in memory the fact, that you have no power whatever of preventing our marriage, I cannot but think that a little quiet meditation on what I have said, may lead you to change your opinion concerning it."

There was a long pause after the widow reached this point, for she herself very judiciously thought that it would be difficult for her to place the question in a better light; and the dowager also evidently felt, that the arguments to which she had listened deserved more attention than would be consistent with a very prompt reply.

At length she said, but in a tone considerably different from what she had used before: "Has the original of that letter been sent to Mr. Barlow, Mrs. Fitzjames?"

"Yes, Lady de Paddington. I put it into the post myself, as I came hither," she quietly replied. "It was left in my hands for the purpose of inserting the name of the legal gentleman whom I might wish to appoint to meet Lord Goldstable's man of business, and I have done this. But if your Ladyship has any doubt

of the fact, it would be very easy to ascertain it by an application to Mr. Barlow himself."

And then followed another long pause, during which Lady de Paddington sedulously employed herself in wiping the glasses of her spectacles with her pocket-handkerchief, while Mrs. Fitzjames amused herself by arranging the relative positions of her coral bracelets, and her embroidered cuffs."

"It may be admitted certainly, and I have no intention of denying it, Mrs. Fitzjames," resumed the old lady at length, "that there is at least the appearance of good sense in much that you have just said; and I will not deny, moreover, that you have, on the whole, appeared to behave towards me with very praiseworthy and judicious candour. Neither do I see any objection to my confessing to you, that I think it very possible that you would make a better wife for my poor dear Edward, than that very young, and decidedly very silly girl, Miss Harrington. And, being aware of this, it certainly becomes my duty to weigh the question deliberately, whether it may not, on the whole, be advisable for me to remove the principal objection to

your becoming Lady Goldstable, by at once openly showing the world that I, his only near relation, approve and encourage the match."

"Your doing so frankly, openly, and courageously, Lady de Paddington, would deserve, on my part, a very liberal demonstration of gratitude in return; and at once, let me tell you, that I am fully prepared to offer this. Name your own terms, and if they appear to me to be at all reasonable, they shall be complied with. You will perceive by my thus expressing myself, that I am disposed to waive all affectation, and all false delicacy, in this negotiation. It is quite certain that we are about to be very nearly connected; and, in my opinion, we shall both of us be giving the best proof of sound judgment and good sense, by dismissing everything like ceremony and reserve from our intercourse."

"Upon my word, Mrs. Fitzjames, I believe you are right," replied the conquered dowager. "It is impossible not to perceive that you are a person of no ordinary ability, and this is a consideration that is likely to have great weight with me, for I hate fools, and detest nothing so much as being involved in any affair of business with them. Of course you know that

my first object is the poor dear boy's happiness; but as I have suffered an immense deal of anxiety about him, and have always held myself ready to make any sacrifices in the world in order to secure to him the advantages of good society—to which, as you must be aware, his rustic bringing-up has hitherto been a great impediment—I confess I feel that I have a right to look for some advantages in return. My jointure is a shamefully small one, Mrs. Fitzjames, and I really think that, as his nearest relation, I have some claim to assistance from his noble revenue."

"I was fully aware, my dear Madam, that your jointure was much less than it ought to have been," replied the widow, with a business-like air, which showed her to be perfectly *au fait* of the subject before them. "And it was in consequence of this, that the obvious advantages of a clear understanding between us become so apparent to me. The fact is, Lady de Paddington, that we can be mutually useful to each other, and I believe it is equally a fact that we are neither of us so deficient in common sense as not to make use of this common stock of utility."

"You are quite right, Mrs. Fitzjames, in

your estimate of my understanding, and I therefore flatter myself, that you will be equally so in your estimate of my heart. It is a truly affectionate one, I do assure you, and nothing but my belief in the strength of dear Edward's love for you, could induce me to act as I now intend to do."

Mrs. Fitzjames really was a very clever, sharp-witted woman; she perfectly understood the character of the highly respectable old lady she had to deal with, and was a good deal amused at her highly respectable mode of doing business. She had been all her life accustomed to see iniquities of all sorts openly proposed, and openly assented to; but she found that in the superior circle within which she now hoped to enter, there was so strong a sense of propriety existing as to render it necessary that the *tête-à-tête* plotting of two confidential compeers should be decorated with a little hypocrisy. It was clearly evident that Lady de Paddington was so much used to humbug, that she could not do without it; and the less respectable sinner laughed in her sleeve at the weakness, but immediately complied with this decorous demand for drapery by replying with admirable aptitude of manner:

"Indeed, indeed, Lady de Paddington, I would not undertake this grave responsibility did I not think that I should be able to make our dear Edward happy. I shall, believe me, enter on this solemn engagement with the most earnest desire to fulfil all the duties of a good and affectionate wife."

"This ought to satisfy me, my dear Mrs. Fitzjames; and under the full persuasion that this solemn promise will be kept, I frankly promise you my countenance and assistance. I certainly had been much prejudiced against you, and it was under the persuasion that you were a very different person from what I now find you, that I so strongly opposed your union with my nephew. But your admirably frank and loyal manner, and conduct, have completely disarmed me. And now tell me, my dear, do you know anything of Lord Goldstable's present movements?"

"Oh yes, my dear lady," replied the beautiful widow, with a look of pretty innocent confidence. "Edward sets off the day after to-morrow to Brandon Abbey. He has invited that very eccentric old gentleman, Mr. Walter Harrington, to go down there with him, and the odd old man has agreed to do so, though

dear Edward told him explicitly that he had no intention whatever of marrying his niece. And this strange arrangement has suggested to me a plan which I should like to submit to your judgment. The fact is, dear Lady de Paddington, that though this whimsical old man has decidedly done me an acceptable service by persuading Edward to break through his entanglement with Miss Harrington, I by no means wish that my dear innocent-hearted Edward should be left altogether in his hands. I will confess to you, that I have an instinctive dislike to that old man, amounting almost to antipathy. And, in short, I shall not be easy in my mind, unless I can contrive to be near enough to counteract his influence."

"You are quite right, my dear—quite right," replied the dowager, knitting her brows with an expression which showed her to be very much in earnest. "There is something about that Mr. Walter Harrington which inspires me with fear whenever I approach him, as if I were coming within reach of some noxious animal. I am extremely sorry to hear of Edward's becoming intimate with him."

"Well then, dear lady, listen to my little

scheme, which, as I flatter myself, will effectually prevent his doing your dear nephew any permanent injury. Your Ladyship has doubtless heard of the new water-cure establishment that has been so much talked of lately at Doucham? Well, Doucham is only three miles distant from Brandon. Now it strikes me, that if you and I, my dear lady, were to make a little excursion to Doucham for the sake of your health, we should be quite near enough to watch over the interest and happiness of our dear Edward. It is a very healthy and a very beautiful place, and the excursion might really do you good, my dear Lady de Paddington, even if you did not put yourself into the hands of the professor."

"Oh! as to that, I should as soon think of being tied, neck and heels, like a blind puppy, humanely prepared for drowning. But that would not signify a farthing. Wherever a great many people go, a great many more people will be sure to follow them. It is the fashion, you know, among all people of distinction to do so. But there is one great objection, Mrs. Fitzjames, and one which must prevent me from agreeing to the plan, though

I will not deny that it has a good deal to recommend it. I have heard that Doucham is a very dear place, and the fact is, that I cannot afford such an excursion."

"On this occasion," replied Mrs. Fitzjames, eagerly, "your Ladyship must forgive me if I take the liberty of saying that if my proposal is acted upon, it can only be upon one condition—namely, that you should consider yourself as my guest from the moment you quit the door of your own mansion till you return to it. It is impossible that I can consent to go on any other terms. Is it not to secure the happiness of my life, that this journey will be undertaken? And will not the obligation you will confer on me be of the most important kind? Besides," added the clever creature, with a sweet smile, "the relative positions we are about to stand in to each other, my dearest lady, will often make our purse a common one, so it will be surely best for us to put aside all idle scruples at once."

It would have been evident to a much less acute observer than the wily widow, Fitzjames, that this last hit had decided the victory in her favour. In fact, the temptation she now held

out would have proved irresistible to the needy and penurious old dowager, even if the scheme itself had been disagreeable to her; but this was very far from being the case. She paused only long enough to perform a most benignant smile, which acted upon her visage like the drawing up of a curtain upon the stage, displaying a complete change of scenery and decorations.

"Indeed, my dear Mrs. Fitzjames," she replied, in the most friendly tone imaginable, "your plan is much too agreeable a one for me to object to adopting it. And, moreover, it is perfectly true that, under the circumstances, our presence near Brandon Abbey, may be of the most important service to our poor dear Edward. I will, therefore, go with you to Doucham with great pleasure. When do you think, my dear lady, that we ought to start?"

"As soon after he leaves London as possible," answered the active widow with great promptitude. "Suppose we say Monday next, my dear Lady de Paddington? I know that he goes on Saturday."

"With all my heart, my dear. So be it then. On Monday morning I shall be quite

ready for you. I suppose you will be able to call for me, that we may drive to the railroad station together?"

"Oh yes, dearest Lady de Paddington. It is now, as it ever will be, equally my duty and my pleasure to wait upon you."

"You are a very charming young woman, Mrs. Fitzjames; I promise you that I can see that as plainly as my nephew," returned the old lady, shaking hands with her very cordially. "On Monday morning then, at about ten o'clock I shall expect you. The half-past ten will be the train for us, I think."

"Exactly," replied the fair Sophia. "And now, dear lady, I will leave you infinitely happier, as you will readily believe, than before I had the happiness of knowing you as I do now. Such a noble heart as yours, Lady de Paddington, must be thoroughly studied, in order to be properly appreciated."

"God bless you, my dear child! Good-by," returned her Ladyship. "Take care of yourself. I really doubt if all England could furnish a wife that I should more cordially approve for my dear Edward."

The state of mind in which the beautiful

widow walked back to her lodgings in Jermyn Street, after her perilous interview had reached this happy conclusion, might be easily described, but it may also be easily imagined, and therefore we will leave her for the present—not without mentioning, however, that the half of poor Lord Goldstable's tender effusion was faithfully delivered to her on the morrow by her "honour-bright" friend, Captain Fowler; and the flattering persuasion that her sudden withdrawal from London would effectually puzzle him as to her whereabouts, made his visit upon this occasion as every way agreeable as his last appearance before her had been the reverse.

CHAPTER IX.

When Walter Harrington returned to Vale Street after his visit to Lord Goldstable, he found his nephew Henry waiting to see him. The venerable traveller had been too early for him in the morning, but the servant who admitted the active old gentleman on his return, told him that his nephew had inquired for him at least a dozen times since ten o'clock.

"What is it, Harry, my boy?" said the cheerful old man, as his nephew entered his attic *sanctum*. "There is nothing the matter, I hope. You have been waiting to see me all the morning, Robert says."

"If you are at leisure, my dear uncle," replied the young man, "I must have a long talk

with you upon an important subject, but far from a pleasant one."

"My time is yours, Henry," replied Walter, kindly, "and my services, also, if the disagreeables you mention admit of mending by anything I can do. I hope you have nothing very bad to tell me."

"Why, I am afraid that it is rather a bad business," said the young man, gravely, as he seated himself opposite to his uncle. "It is about Caldwell, Sir, that I wanted to speak to you. I greatly fear that he is not what we have supposed him to be; and I more than fear that if my suspicions are well-founded, and if, indeed, he proves to be unworthy, it will be a tremendously heavy blow to our poor dear Kate."

"Proved unworthy?" said the old man, with a greatly altered countenance. "Be careful what you listen to, nephew Harry! Be careful not to do an honourable man injustice by believing slanders. I tell you fairly, that it will be no easy matter to make me believe that Frank Caldwell is unworthy. I have seen more of him, Harry, than you have, and I think I know him. Yes, my young Sir, I think I *know* him. Nay, at this very moment, before listening to any of

your reasons for judging otherwise, I shall be ready to hold a heavy wager that you have been somehow or other led into an error, and that Frank Caldwell will eventually prove to be all that I think him."

"Heaven grant you may be right, my dear uncle," replied young Harrington. "I should confess my blunder with a feeling more like triumph than defeat, for I most sincerely liked and esteemed the man, and thought him in every way suited to Kate, and likely to make her happy; but if all I have to tell you be not a dream, I shall no longer be able to deny that even that gilded oaf, Lord Goldstable, would be a more desirable match for her than Caldwell."

"Tell me at once, then! Tell me everything," said the old man, impatiently. "What are your reasons, Harry, for thinking thus? At any rate, we will put our heads together, and sift the matter to the bottom, before we finally decide upon preferring Lord Goldstable to Frank Caldwell."

"I grieve to say," replied the young man, "that my suspicions rest not upon hearsay evidence, but upon what I have myself seen. Now listen to me, Uncle Walter, and judge for yourself.

I was induced last night to accompany a college friend of mine—who, by the way, I sadly fear, is going the shortest and fastest road to ruin—to a low hell in Aylesbury Street. I will not say that I never flung away a guinea in such a hole myself; but I assure you that last night I went solely with a view of endeavouring to check poor Saunderson, who was rather more than half-intoxicated when I got hold of him, and whom I would fain have dissuaded from going if I could. Well, we were in an outer room, where they were playing chicken-hazard, and from which we could see the crowd of *rouge et noir* players around the table in the inner *sanctum* or rather *profanum*, I suppose I should say. Well, my dear Sir, we had been in this abominable den some time, and I was doing my utmost to persuade Saunderson to cheat the devil and come away with me, when a sudden dispute in the inner room caused a movement among the players. This attracted my attention, and I made a step forward to look in amongst them, when whom should I see amongst the loudest and most excited of the disputants but Frank Caldwell! I can assure you, that I could not and would not very easily believe my eyes, and

would fain have made up my mind to disbelieve them; but then came the additional evidence of my ears, for as the altercation grew louder and more vehement, the name of Caldwell was more than once pronounced with most unmistakeable distinctness. No! Uncle Walter—there was no mistake about it. There was the man whom we had believed to be so extra-fastidious in all the niceties of honour, so elevated in all his notions, so superior, so refined in all his tastes and pursuits, there he was, brawling away among the lowest *habitués* of a low gaming-house! Hang the fellow! if he had been a frank rake, there might be hope for him. Wild oats may be sown, and done with. Charles Surface might contain the material of an honest man in him; but Joseph never! Think of the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of the scamp!"

And Henry Harrington sprung from his chair and paced the room with honest, but very painful indignation.

"Did he see you, Henry?" inquired his uncle.

"No, Sir, he did not, replied the young man; "nor did I give any indication of having seen him. What use would there have been in doing so?"

"Perhaps not," rejoined the old gentleman, musingly. "But that was not what I was thinking of, Harry. I was thinking that if he had seen you, he might have drawn the same conclusions respecting you, that you have so naturally done respecting him; and if he had, he would, thank God, have been mistaken, Harry. How do we know that he might not have been able to give as good a reason for being there as you have done?"

"Impossible!" returned Henry. "You forget, my dear Sir, that Caldwell was not a looker-on, but hotly engaged in the game, and hotly engaged, too, in a brawling altercation arising out of it! No, my dear uncle, there can be no second opinion on this point. The man I saw was a vulgar, desperate gambler, and I believe, from the tone of his voice, that he was half-drunk into the bargain."

"I still do not think the evidence sufficient to convict," replied Walter, "though abundantly sufficient to justify, nay, to necessitate further and very strict inquiry. It is still possible, in my opinion, that a man may be betrayed into going to such a place, and even playing and getting into a passion there, without being, or

deserving to be, classed either as an habitual gambler, or an habitual brawler. And if you are right in believing him to have been tipsy, the chances in favour of the whole thing being accidental are greatly increased. No, Henry; I won't give him up yet."

"Yes, Sir, it is possible," replied his nephew, thoughtfully, "though, alas! I assuredly feel that it is not probable. My own conviction is, that the man I saw there, and heard addressed as Caldwell, was a familiar visitor at the place, and was talking to, and disputing with, persons whom he knew, and who knew him. It is impossible for me to communicate to you this conviction of mine. Nothing save being a witness to the scene could give this conviction. Yet this is exactly the point which it is most important to ascertain. Was Frank Caldwell in the Aylesbury Street hell last night for the first time? If this can be proved, I can very readily believe that it will have been for the last also. And this is the question, Uncle Walter, upon which I must satisfy myself to-night, if possible. I will go again to the same house. If it be as I suppose, I shall, in all probability, again find my gentleman there; and if not, I

shall have little difficulty in getting some of the frequenters of the place to speak on the subject of the row that I witnessed last night, and shall then easily learn whether the person who appeared to be chiefly concerned in it, is well-known there or only an accidental visitor."

"I warned you at first, Henry, that you would find it difficult to shake my good opinion of a man whom I have known as I have known Caldwell," returned Walter. "And you must excuse me, if I still say that I am not convinced —nay, to tell you the truth, I am not quite sure that I should be, even if your second report appeared to corroborate the first. There are so many sources of error!"

"I'll tell you what, uncle," cried Henry eagerly, "by far the best and wisest plan would be for you to go with me yourself. It would decidedly be the most satisfactory course in every point of view. You will then estimate whatever evidence we may be able to obtain for yourself far more justly than you could from any report of mine. What say you, Sir? Have you any engagement for to-night?"

"None, I believe, Henry," replied the old man. "But don't you think that I shall look

somewhat out of place there, eh? Will not the entrance of such a grave and reverend senior as your old uncle be apt to cause rather a sensation, and occasion a degree of observation more flattering than acceptable? I take it, that silvery locks like mine do not much congregate around that board of green cloth, eh, Harry? Old age, I am afraid you may have there, worse luck! but such a head of hair as this does not grow by gas-light, I suspect; nor on the top of fevered brains."

"Perhaps not, uncle," replied young Harrington, smiling, "but, nevertheless, you may safely come without fearing any special demonstration of reverence from the votaries of the play demon. Every man there at least, if nowhere else in the world, minds his own business, and takes wondrously little heed of his neighbours. I believe that if the Archbishop of Canterbury were to make his appearance among them in full canonicals, the apparition would not interrupt the monotonous and inevitable 'Make your game, gentlemen,' 'The game is made.' Come, in short, in any form, save that of a policeman, and none will trouble their heads about you."

"If such be the case, Harry," replied the veteran, "I will accept your proposition, and add a London gaming-house to the long list of queer places that I have visited in my time. At what hour ought we to go?"

"At any time after midnight," replied the young man. "These haunts are rarely, I believe, in full operation before. We may leave this house about twelve."

"So be it," said Walter; "and most earnestly do I hope that we may not find what we go to look for. It makes my heart ache to think of the misery which his unworthiness would cause to my dear Kate. She loves him so truly, so devotedly."

"Heaven grant that I may have blundered!" replied Henry, and so saying he left the warm-hearted old man, with far from agreeable meditations, in the uninterrupted possession of his lofty retreat.

CHAPTER X.

It was very punctually a little after twelve o'clock that the uncle and nephew started together, according to their appointment, and took their way to Aylesbury Street, a locality sufficiently notorious as the haunt of a number of those unclean beasts of prey, whose existence is the opprobrium and reproach of our boasted police.

"'Tis said, and I believe the tale," that in the huge world of London there are a vast variety of different districts devoted, as it were, to various specialities. Commerce, law, literature, fashion, all have their well-known haunts. Vice, too, has hers. Vulgar crime has its well-marked lairs, branded and proclaimed to all the

world; but, though more aristocratic, sin has also its favourite and peculiar quarters, its geography is less publicly laid down. There is, moreover, as the learned in such matters declare, a very curious district in the vast Babylon where, though it is by no means the region of wealthy ease, the business of life begins at a much later hour of the day, and is continued to a much later hour of the night than elsewhere. It is a district where certain trades, seemingly innocent enough in other localities, are said to be not altogether reputable callings, and where it is avowed more emphatically than in any other civilized region, that no man knows how his neighbour lives. Moreover, whatever may be the cause of the coincidence, beards and moustaches are more commonly seen there than in any other part of the metropolis. It was by a short cut towards this quarter that Henry Harrington now led the steps of his venerable uncle.

Few men, however, who had seen the pair stepping out smartly and firmly, arm-in-arm, would have guessed that there was some fifty years of difference in their ages; and fewer still, could they have rightly read the thoughts

and feelings which were passing through the minds of each, would have rightly guessed which was the old man and which the young one. Henry Harrington was most deeply and sincerely interested in the great object of their expedition, but the scene itself which he was about to visit had neither novelty nor interest of any kind left for him. It was all *connu, connu.*"

But Walter had never, in the whole course of his long life, seen anything of the sort before; and no young lad, in life's freshest morning, could have felt a keener interest, or more exciting curiosity in the scene he was about to visit.

He asked Henry a thousand questions as they walked towards it; and by the time they reached their destination had worked up his imagination to the utmost, by figuring to himself all the various and strongly-marked manifestations of human passion which he was about to witness.

When they arrived in Aylesbury Street, it was near one. The Cerberus who guarded the approach to this earthly hell made no difficulty about admitting them, being probably propitiated by some open-sesame sort of sop, of

which Henry Harrington administered the needful portion; and having entered unchallenged, Walter followed his nephew to the second floor.

The two first rooms were brilliantly lighted, and thronged with players thickly grouped around the respective tables. The third room contained a variety of refreshments.

Their entrance was as unnoticed as Henry had predicted it would be; in fact, their approach to the tables did not appear to excite the slightest attention or curiosity in any way. The jingle of cash; the sharp click of the croupier's rakes, as they gathered in the stakes lost; and the weary repetition of the ever-unchanging formula of the dealers, continued to go on, on, on, without the slightest interruption. Indeed, with the exception of an occasionally short glance from a very unobtrusive-looking individual, who appeared to be lounging there without any particular object, the new-comers appeared, and in fact really were, totally unnoticed. The short sharp glance was from the eye of the proprietor of the establishment; but nobody seemed to take any notice of him.

Henry stationed himself and his grey-headed companion close behind the croupier at the table in the outer room; and while ostensibly occupied in watching the fluctuating chances of the game, they were both anxiously engaged in reconnoitring the features of the players.

The crowded state of the room rendered this a business of some difficulty; but in about half an hour both gentlemen had satisfied themselves that the object of their search was not there. Henry laid his hand upon his uncle's arm, and motioned him towards the inner room.

"So far, so good," whispered Walter, as they threaded their way through the crowd.

"Yes," replied his nephew. "But remember, that it was in the inner room that I saw him last night."

By the exercise of a little patience, they succeeded in establishing themselves in a similar situation at the second table, where *rouge et noir* was the game played; and again they cautiously commenced an investigation of every face in the room. Gradually they had acquired almost the certainty, that the man they so dreaded to see was not in this room either; and Walter's confidence and hopes were mount-

ing fast, when a sudden burst of loud voices and laughter reached them from the third room—in which were materials for supper, in the proportion of a pennyworth of bread to a terribly abundant supply of sack, in the shape of London-brewed champagne—and caused both the uncle and nephew to continue their examination in that direction.

In the very next moment they saw Caldwell in the doorway, hastily advancing into the play-room with a face flushed with wine, and a step lamentably far from being steady. He paused on the other side of the table, and stood for a minute or two exactly opposite to them, and one would have thought that he must have seen them; but either from intoxication, as it seemed, or else from his eagerness to watch the table, he did not appear to have noticed them.

Walter made an immediate movement to approach him; but his nephew, divining his intention, caught him by the arm, and drew him towards the outer room, whispering as he did so:

"Not now! not here! What use would there be in speaking to him in the state he is now in? Remember, too, where we are!

Think of the effect of making a scene here! Look at the people round you!"

"I see, I see! you are right, quite right! Let us get out of this accursed den!" said the old man, dejectedly. "Alas! alas! I have had enough of it. I want to breathe God's atmosphere again, though it be but in the streets of London, instead of this hot, thick breath of hell! Come, Henry! come!"

"One moment's patience, my dear Sir," returned his nephew. "You forget that our painful task is but half done. Since we have undertaken this most unpleasant business, let us go through with it, and put the matter beyond all possibility of further doubt. Even two nights passed in this abominable place will not, it may be argued, necessarily prove a man to be an utter cast-away. It is still necessary that we should ascertain whether he is known here as an *habitué*."

"True, Henry, true!" said Walter, almost with a groan. "Let us put the finishing stroke to it at once. But where must we seek the information we want?"

"I saw a man in the other room whom I know well enough to speak to. He will, I have

no doubt, be able to tell us all we wish to know," replied Henry; and so saying, he steered his way towards a haggard and weary-looking young man, who was leaning against the wall with his arms folded, and seeming to be actually dropping to sleep as he stood.

"What! is that you, Milbury?" said Harrington, touching him on the shoulder. "Why, you really do not look much more amused here, my good fellow, than if you were at home and in bed. You are all but asleep, man."

"Yes," yawned the gambler, "it is such tiring work, always losing, losing, losing, without ever getting a turn of luck!"

"If play can no longer keep you awake, Milbury, I take it you must be used up, old fellow," said Harrington.

"Not a bit of it. That's not it. Try me," replied the hopeful youth. "But the fact is, that I am cleared out for to-night, and it is so devilish dull going home so early. You havn't a five-pound note you could lend me, have you? That confounded scamp, Tenbey, does not understand credit, he says. But I suppose you have got nothing left, or you would not be going away so early yourself?"

"I have not been playing at all to-night; I only came to look about me," replied Harrington. "But I say, Milbury, isn't that Caldwell in the next room? He's a Middle Temple man, isn't he? I did not know he was a playing man."

"And I did not know he was a Temple man," replied the other. "What he is after sunrise I neither know nor care. But he's one of the peep-of-day boys here, and would be a very steady player if he did not drink. But poor Caldwell is tipsy half his time."

"Well, good night, I'm off; but here's a couple of yellow boys, Milbury: it is all I have in my pocket, and I wish you good luck with them."

The limed bird, now perfectly awake, returned once again to the fatal table, and the two Harringtons found their way into the street as quickly and as quietly as they could.

"And is it possible," cried Walter, with a groan, "is it possible that this is the man with whom I have so often conversed on all the highest themes that can employ the human mind? Is it indeed possible that he could be thus engaged, hour after hour, as the evening

stole away, to hasten from such converse, afterwards, to these accursed orgies? Can it be? Oh, Harry, Harry! I am more unhappy, more miserable than I can express to you! Alas! alas! poor Kate!"

"Poor Kate!" echoed her brother, sadly; "I truly pity her!"

"Poor child! poor loving little heart!" said Walter, almost with a sob, so vehement was the shock his mind had received. "But she has escaped a fearful fate!" he added, solemnly: "a drunken gambler's wife! Thank God, she has escaped it! But oh, Harry! think of the awful rent made in the whole structure of one's trust in man! think of the earthquake to one's whole moral nature! Who can one trust? Who can one fail to doubt? It is a sad lesson to come upon one at four-score!"

CHAPTER XI.

For the first time, during many a year, old Walter Harrington passed a sleepless night, after his excursion to Aylesbury Street. The grief which the painful discovery he had made occasioned him was indeed profound; and the acuteness of his distress and disturbance was a striking evidence of the freshness of the old traveller's mind and feelings.

One deception, and one disappointment the more, can rarely produce so great an effect on an old man's view of his fellow-creatures. But it was old Walter's first adventure of the sort. He now found himself, for the first time in his life, utterly deceived, and taken in by one whom he had very highly esteemed, and most

implicitly trusted; and his sorrow and disappointment were greatly like those of a quite young man under similar circumstances.

He had, in truth, seen wonderfully little of worldly men and their worldly ways in his long and peaceful passage through life; the sort of unnatural hot-house civilization of great cities was, in fact, unknown to him, and he now felt strongly inclined to renounce the race altogether, and fly for solace to the pure companionship of his beloved nature. It was in such thoughts as these that he passed the few, but very heavy hours till it was his usual time to get up for his morning walk.

The fresh morning air of Hyde Park, unpoisoned as yet by its daily potion of smoke, seemed to brace his nerves, and calm his mind, so that by the time he returned to Vale Street to breakfast, he had determined on the course which he thought he ought to pursue. It was clear that under the circumstances he could no longer, for an instant, appear to advocate the pretensions of Caldwell to his niece's hand, and it was certainly due to his brother and sister-in-law that they should at once be made acquainted with the true state of the case.

At this really terrible moment, however, he more than ever rejoiced at having so effectually liberated Kate from the addresses of Lord Goldstable. Had it been otherwise, her difficulties would have been greatly increased, by the weighty arguments which the acknowledged worthlessness of Caldwell would have furnished in favour of his more estimable rival.

It had become quite evident to him, however, from the repeated evasions of both the Doctor and Lady Augusta, that it was not intended to let him know where Kate really was. This very disagreeable concealment would, he flattered himself cease, of course, as soon as his altered opinion of Caldwell should be avowed; and he hastened to make the painful statement, as he was now more than ever anxious to ascertain the place of Kate's exile, as he particularly wished to be himself the bearer of the news which, he knew, would affect her so deeply.

Henry Harrington rarely breakfasted with his family, nor did he make his appearance now, so that the family party consisted only of Lady Augusta, the Doctor, and Walter.

When the breakfast was finished, Walter,

who had been unusually silent during the repast, suddenly said:

"Before we separate, brother, I wish to say a few words on a subject which we all have much at heart, if you and Lady Augusta can spare me a few moments."

Lady Augusta glanced at her husband and coloured, while the Doctor fidgetted rather uneasily upon his chair, although he replied very politely:

"With all my heart, brother; my time is always yours, excepting, indeed, when it is forestalled by the laborious duties and grave responsibilities of my position."

It was very evident that both father and mother expected that some strong remonstrance, or, perhaps, some gentle threat respecting the ultimate disposition of the family acres, was coming, with reference to Kate's present exile, and future marriage.

"Well then, my dear brother," returned Walter, "to take up as little of your valuable time as may be, I will tell you and Lady Augusta in one word, that I no longer wish to see my niece married to Mr. Caldwell; but, on the contrary, that I am as much bent on

opposing any such union, as it is possible that you can be. And, moreover, I wish to assure you, that I have not the slightest doubt that when Kate hears the reasons I shall give her for my change of opinion on the subject, she also will at once and for ever abandon every idea of such a marriage."

"God be thanked, my dear brother!" cried the Doctor, fervently. "God be thanked, that your natural good sense has at last shown you how entirely right Lady Augusta and I were in this matter. I am, indeed, most truly glad that we are no longer a house divided against itself on this interesting subject. Some minds, my dear Walter, are slower in arriving at truth than others," added the Doctor, in a tone of magesterial philosophy, "although the slower may reach it with great certainty at last. There are intelligences, brother Walter, which pierce, as we may say, with one single glance, one single eagle glance, my dear Walter, to the heart of a subject—mastering all the bearings of it in a moment, and seizing upon the truth with an unerring grasp. You may remember that I was always deemed a quick boy, my dear Walter, and it may be that the long habit of

wielding undisputed authority in various spheres, may have ripened my faculties, and imparted additional value to my judgment: I merely say that it *may* have done so. God only knows what we are! And His unerring providence can best select the shoulders capable of supporting the heavy weight of influence and of power."

"My natural anxiety for my dear child's welfare," said Lady Augusta, anxious to appropriate her share of the triumph, "makes me, of course, rejoice to hear that my maternal exertions for her welfare and happiness will no longer be counteracted by the weight of your opinion, my dear Sir. I trust that we shall now have no farther difficulty in bringing the poor wrong-headed girl to reason. At the same time I cannot but say that it is very painful to the feelings of a mother—and such a mother as I have ever been to her, Mr. Walter Harrington—to be told that she will yield that obedience to the authority of an uncle, which she refused to the entreaties of her mother."

Lady Augusta had not the gift of tears, neither, in truth, would any such manifestation of tender weakness have been consistent with

the dignified tone of her character; but there was, as she was herself fully conscious, a very affecting expression in her eyes as she raised them to Heaven, slowly and sadly shaking her head as she did so.

"But you mistake altogether, my dear Madam," cried Walter, eagerly. "God forbid that Kate should yield her own judgment on such a point as this to any authority of mine! Believe me I have no intention, no wish to exercise any—nor even of giving her advice, for I am sure it will not be needed. Facts, Lady Augusta, some very painful facts have, by Henry's assistance, been brought to light respecting Caldwell; and these are the stubborn reasoners which will compel the mind of your daughter to come to the same conclusion that I have done myself—namely, that Caldwell is, in truth, very far unlike what we believed him to be. When I spoke with certainty of her giving him up, I calculated on my knowledge of her purity of heart, and rectitude of thinking, and not on any subservience on her part to my wishes, or even to my judgment."

"That is all very right and proper, perfectly so, my dear Sir; but still I cannot help thinking

that rectitude, and propriety, and all that sort of thing, are best shown in the conduct of a young lady, by obedience to the will of her parents," replied Lady Augusta, with great solemnity.

"But tell me, my dear Walter," cried the Doctor, hastening to check the eloquence of his lady, which seemed to him, at this moment, more vehement than judicious; for he by no means wished to offend his elder brother, "tell me, what has led you at last to think of this very presumptuous young man as he deserves? I always saw through him from the very first, Walter! You will admit, I think, that I showed some knowledge of character in this, brother? In fact, I saw what the fellow was at a glance."

"I confess that I did not," replied Walter, humbly. "I confess that I was most woefully deceived in him. But it is sufficient that we now agree upon the subject. I never wish to think of him, nor to hear of him again, if possible."

"Nay, Walter," returned his brother, with a patronizing air; "I do not think that there is any reason for your feeling nettled or humiliated at thus finding yourself mistaken. You

really must not suffer any such feeling to make you uncomfortable. Remember that you have not—and indeed few men have—enjoyed such opportunities of studying all the varieties of human character, as my distinguished position has given me. Neither can the same rapidity of intuitive discernment be expected from you. Neither nature, nor education, my dear Walter, has prepared you for such a task. The good sense which has at last, though slowly, led your mind to the conclusion that my opinion was not likely to be erroneous, is of itself very highly creditable to you."

The elder brother, who was still evidently, in the eyes of his reverend junior, the naughty boy who would not learn Greek, received this modicum of approbation very modestly, and only said in reply: "If I knew where Kate was, I would myself undertake to communicate to her the change in my opinion, and give her the reasons which I feel so perfectly sure will cause her to change hers also."

The Doctor directed a speaking look of inquiry towards his lady; and seeing plainly that her judgment coincided upon this important point with his own, ventured, without

hesitation, to reply: "Kate is now, I believe, with her brother James, at Stanton Parva. At least they went there, I believe, upon their leaving London, and I have no doubt they are there still. Do you wish to write to her, Walter?"

"I would rather speak to her," replied his brother. "And if she be really still at Stanton, it will be exceedingly convenient to me, for I have promised Lord Goldstable to go down with him to Brandon Abbey to-morrow; and Brandon is but three miles from Stanton, as you must well remember, Henry."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the Doctor, not a little astonished. "I had no idea that you—that is, I mean, that he—Lord Goldstable is owner of Brandon Abbey, is he? Well, to be sure, how very strangely things do come to pass! To think that Brandon Woods, where you and I, Walter, have so often gone bird-nesting, should come to be —but how did the property come into the hands of Lord Goldstable?"

"What *can* that signify, Dr. Harrington?" tartly demanded his practical better half: "and how can a scarcely seemly allusion to bird-

nesting, assist us in examining the important business before us? I must say, that my brother-in-law has shown much judgment, and really very great tact, in arranging this visit exactly at the critical moment when that low young man's real position became evident to him. It was very cleverly thought of—quite a master-stroke—and I really honour him for it."

Again Walter received his laurels very meekly; and having waited till her Ladyship's laudatory harangue was over, he replied to his brother's question by saying: "The purchase was made years ago, Henry, when you were the absentee Rector of Stanton, and I the absentee Squire. And this Lord Goldstable inherits this property, and a large portion of his other immense possessions, from the purchaser, who was his uncle, or cousin, or related to him some way or other. I have not forgotten, I promise you, our old truant days among those woods, Henry; and there I was as much your master, as you were mine in old Ponsonby's school-room. It will be a great pleasure to me to see those places over again."

"And you start to-morrow?" inquired Lady Augusta, impatient to bring the conversation

back from those unprofitable reminiscences to things of present moment.

"To-morrow morning at eight," answered Walter, "which was a compromise between the five o'clock start, that I proposed, and the noble young sluggard's eleven."

"Very right, very right!—all very right and proper, my dear Mr. Harrington. But if you will take my advice, my dear Sir, you will not try to put the bit in his mouth too much at first." This was said by Lady Augusta with a greater air of sisterly confidence, than she had ever used before in addressing her venerable brother-in-law. And she added, in a half whisper, after a moment's pause: "The great object would be lost, you know, or at least very much endangered, if he were to take any dislike to you. You must humour him, my dear Mr. Harrington —you must humour him, judiciously, and then we shall have everything in our favour. And I am sure Kate never ought to forget how much she owes you, my dear Sir."

A great deal of this speech was wholly unintelligible to Walter; but this being the case with much of what fell from Lady

Augusta, he had acquired the habit of not listening to her with much attention; and now it was only the last words she had uttered which he perfectly comprehended, and to these he replied by saying: "She has indeed had a narrow escape from the danger of becoming that wretched man's wife!"

"An escape, indeed!" replied the mother, shuddering; "and I trust she will be duly sensible of it! Point out to her, my dear Sir, the unremitting anxiety of all her family, your kind self included, for her welfare; and endeavour to make her feel the wickedness and ingratitude of resisting their wishes. And do tell her, my dear Mr. Harrington, to be sure to put a white camilla in her hair when she dresses for dinner. She had one on the night of our ball, and I think it may be important."

"I say, Henry!" suddenly exclaimed Walter, who, during this last harangue, had been indulging his memory by letting it wander back to the scenes of his early youth, "do you remember the old house at Stanton, and those solemn days when we used to pay a grand visit to my uncle? I remember every bit of

it, as if it were but yesterday. Tell me, Henry, what sort of fellow is James? Is he like his brother?"

"I am very sorry to say," replied the Doctor, solemnly, "that I have of late seen much to reprehend in James's character and conduct. For many years of his life, my son James was really all that I could wish him to be, and never gave me a moment of anxiety or pain. At college he was as regular at morning chapel as the Dean; and I don't think that his name was ever sent up as being out after hours. But latterly, I fear—I very greatly fear—that he has been led widely astray; and many things have been reported to me concerning him, that have pained me greatly."

"It is unusual, too," said Walter, thoughtfully, "for a young man to have passed safely through the temptations of a college life, and then to transgress, in what should seem the much safer position of clergyman in a country parish."

"I can by no means agree with you there, brother Walter," replied the Doctor, knitting his brows into an expression of painful thought. "The isolation of a country parish, where there

are no ecclesiastical superiors at hand, is exactly the atmosphere where these grievous divagations are most frequently found. I have been repeatedly told of late that James has gone to the extent of preaching in his surplice !"

"The lazy dog !" cried Walter, after a short pause, during which he had been endeavouring to comprehend the nature of the enormity complained of. "The lazy dog ! He will go to bed in his clothes next, I suppose, to save himself the trouble of taking them off. I'll give him a *sisserara* for such a trick as that, you may depend upon it."

The Doctor looked at his brother, much as Mr. Shandy might have looked at some of Uncle Toby's hopeless manifestations of simplicity ; but he very wisely abstained from what he justly considered would be a hopeless attempt to initiate him into the mysteries of that curious *ism*, which is the most recent thorn in Mother Church's vexed side, and which seems to consist in the power of distilling a heterodox spirit from the sinews of a too vigorous orthodoxy ; for the Doctor judiciously remembered that Walter's notions of English parsons, and their affairs, were what they had been sixty years since,

in the old-fashioned days, when every man of them did his "duty," or it might be the duties, as the case might be, and eat his tithes in peace.

Perhaps some thoughts of these peaceful days passed over the Doctor's mind as he remembered this, for he sighed as he ended the conversation by saying:

"Well, brother, I hope you will enjoy your trip; and perhaps you will give us a line to say how you find all things at the dear old place. But now I must leave you, and attend to my necessary toil in my study."

"And I must go and purchase one or two little feminine articles, which perhaps you will kindly take down to Kate for me, my dear Sir?" said Lady Augusta.

"And I," said Walter, "will go and toss the things I shall want into my portmanteau, where I shall have abundant space, my dear Madam, for anything you may wish to send to Kate."

CHAPTER XXII.

And now it is high time to say something of my gentle heroine, whom we have too long lost sight of. She herself knew nothing whatever in her distant banishment of the circumstances which took place after her departure from London, and little guessed how much had occurred there, of the deepest importance to her present happiness and her future destiny. But though this ignorance certainly spared her much anxiety, there was little or nothing in the asylum thus chosen for her, calculated either to amuse or soothe her mind under all the doubt and anxiety concerning the future which she had carried away with her.

In truth, her brother James's house was little

calculated to make a pleasant home for anybody, at any time; nor was its usual routine rendered at all more agreeable by the presence there of her aunt, the Lady Juliana. That very devout single lady had all through her life been conscious of a special aptitude and vocation to rule and hold authority over some one. But untoward destiny had hitherto frustrated the gifts of nature, and repressed very harshly the development of her governmental capabilities. Her residence in the house of her brother-in-law had, in fact, effectually prevented her from exercising rule or authority of any kind, over even the most humble of her species. For not only the Doctor, but his lady too, had also a pretty talent for governing, so that Lady Juliana's gift in that line had been hitherto of little or no use to her fellow-creatures.

It was now, therefore, for the first time in her life that she had felt the glory and delight of being intrusted with power to rule the acts of another; and she set about performing her task, not only with hearty good-will, but with a decided determination of making the most of it.

It is not very extraordinary, perhaps, that she

should have displayed, under these circumstances, a little of the wantonness of power, as well as the consciousness of it. Be this as it may, it certainly seemed that whatever poor Kate did, had better have been left undone, and that whatever she omitted to do was precisely the only thing that her aunt Lady Juliana could have entirely approved. The most trivial actions of every hour, appeared of sufficient importance in the eyes of her guardian and monitress to call for special observation and special censure.

This active performance of the important duties confided to her by her sister, began the very moment they entered the carriage which conveyed them to the railroad station, continued with unrelaxed activity during every mile of their transit to the Brandon station, ceased not for an instant during the short interval between that station and the parsonage at Stanton; and was now occupying her every moment, save when she was actually asleep, or when some happy chance removed the poor girl for a short interval beyond the reach of her eyes and her voice.

On entering the usual sitting-room the morning after their arrival, Lady Juliana found

Kate seated at the window, gazing listlessly out upon the little flower garden, while her thoughts were busy enough far away.

This was, under any circumstances, a sin in the estimation of the conscientious Lady Juliana, and she began her attack upon it with a groan.

"It is very grievous, Kate," she then proceeded to say, "to find that all the good advice I gave you, when we were coming in the post-chaise from the station, has been so utterly and entirely thrown away. Never, I think, was good seed sown with so small a return. But, thank God, I can truly say I have done my duty; and by His grace, I will continue to do so unto the end. How strongly did I then set before you the guilt of yielding to the desperate sin of idleness! Yet here I see you, on the very first day afterwards, sitting with your eyes wandering about, just as if you did not know that God had given you the blessed gift of sight in order that you might use it in His service. It is this sin of idleness, that is the great and always successful snare of the enemy."

"Had you entered the room a minute or two ago, aunt, you would have found me occupied

in reading. But my thoughts wandered irresistibly from my book. I assure you, that I am fully aware of the sin of idleness, and rarely fail to find some useful occupation for my time; but—"

"Oh, Kate! Kate! I tremble as I listen to you. How surely are the elect marked, as with a seal, which will for ever and for ever prevent the worldly-minded from being confounded with them. And how clearly does every word you utter proclaim the melancholy fact, that as yet you are wholly and altogether unreclaimed."

"My dear aunt, you mistake me greatly, if you think—"

"Think? Do I not hear you talk of rarely failing to find useful occupation? Why should you *ever* fail? Is there not the occupation of prayer? Kneel down, Kate! kneel down this very moment, and pray to be enlightened with the gift of saving grace. Kneel down, Kate!"

But to this sort of impious mummery Kate would not submit; and then the indignant aunt appealed to her nephew James, who at that moment entered the room, upon the obstinate impiety of his sister, in refusing to

comply with a command which ought at all times to be welcomed with thankfulness. But the Reverend James knit his brows in very evident displeasure, as he replied, that he was not aware that the Church had provided any office for such an occasion. He added, nevertheless, after a moment of grave consideration, that the penitential psalms, indeed, were always ready, and always adapted to every imaginable case of sin.

In his heart, however, James was far more inclined to take part with Kate than with his aunt, for the unecclesiastical piety of Lady Juliana was especially distasteful to him; and, in fact, he would greatly have preferred the flighty language of the most careless man of the world on serious subjects, to Lady Juliana's constant reference to "religion," without mixing with it the slightest allusion to "the Church."

In fact, the most peaceful moments that Kate enjoyed during the first two days of her enforced visit to Stanton Rectory, were due to the frequent little tilts and tournaments which were going on between her brother and her aunt.

But while wishing for peace, poor girl, she

made a terrible blunder when, from a good-natured wish to please her brother, she volunteered the use of her needle to embroider an altar-cover for his church. This proposal was occasioned by his lamentations over the great deficiencies in his parish in all such matters, to which he had contrived to make her listen before she had been many hours under his roof; the proposal was hastily made, but still more hastily repented; for the lady-aunt happening to enter the room just at the moment that the well-pleased Rector was describing to his sister the style of decoration he desired, she poured forth such a copious phial of holy wrath against idolatry, popery, false shepherds, and blind leaders of the blind, that the really terrified Kate most heartily repented her indiscretion.

But notwithstanding this vehement religious schism between her brother and aunt, it would have been quite impossible for any two people to have been more perfectly in accord upon the subject of Lord Goldstable's proposal of marriage to her than they were. For the Reverend James, was by no means a man likely to be insensible to the advantages of being brother-in-law to a nobleman possessed of eighty thou-

sand a-year, and patron of more than one good living.

A strong proof of his feelings on this subject, was given to Lady Juliana the next morning but one after their arrival at the Rectory.

The post-bag was, as usual, put into the hands of the Rector; and, standing apart at a window, while he unlocked it, and examined its contents, he perceived that there was a letter addressed to his sister. It immediately struck him, that this letter might probably be from Caldwell, whom he had already been taught to understand was the *bête noire* of the family clique, established to keep guard over Kate during this perilous period of her existence.

No sooner had this idea occurred to him, than he decided upon retaining the letter till he had held a consultation with the Lady Juliana upon the propriety of delivering it at all. He waited till the poor, unsuspicious Kate had left the room, and then approaching the Lady Juliana, with the letter in his hand, he said: "Just look at this letter aunt, and tell me if you know the hand-writing."

"I am almost sure, James, that it is the hand-writing of Mr. Walter Harrington," she replied,

after giving the letter as careful an examination as it was possible to do without breaking the seal. "How can he have found out where Kate is?" she added, with surprise in every feature. "You know, James, that one of your mother's principal objects in sending her out of town, was to remove her from the very pernicious influence of your Uncle Walter's principles and advice."

"Exactly so," replied James, eagerly, "and it therefore appears to me very doubtful whether we should not do wrong in letting Kate have this letter at all."

"But how can we prevent it, James? You see he has found out her address, and actually written to her."

"And do letters never miscarry?" returned the Rector. "For my part, I think it may be very important to the object we have in view, that Kate shall not receive that letter from my uncle."

"But don't you think, James, that it might be wrong, perhaps, to suppress the letter altogether?" suggested her Ladyship, hesitatingly.

"No, my dear aunt, for *me* to do it, not at all wrong. This idea of yours results from the

pernicious and very dangerous practice of suffering the laity to erect themselves into judges in cases of conscience. In better and more religious days, Lady Juliana, all doubts on such points were referred to the spiritual adviser, who alone is competent and lawfully qualified to solve them with a degree of authority which may be satisfactory to the most scrupulous and timid mind. In the present instance, I have no hesitation whatever in saying that the object in view, which is the support of parental authority, and with the ultimate hope of securing the happiness of a thoughtless young girl, perfectly incompetent to judge for herself, with such an object in view, I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that we are fully justified in retaining a letter which might do so much mischief from reaching its destination." With these words, the reverend casuist took the letter in his hand, and paused for a moment ere he added: "It will, however, be our duty I think to ascertain the contents of this paper before we destroy it. There is something painful, certainly, in breaking the seal of a letter addressed to another, even though that other is in a state of pupilage. I confess that I am conscious of a disagreeable

feeling in doing it; but it must be done, because it is a duty, and it is one that may, and must often devolve upon those who have the charge of young people, and it is one from which we certainly ought not to shrink on the present occasion."

"If you think it right to open it, James, and to read the contents, of course you had better do so. It is not necessary for me to meddle in the matter at all," said Lady Juliana, well pleased to have her curiosity gratified at the charge of another person's responsibility.

James, accordingly, with an air of great dignity and discretion, then broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"My dearest Kate,

"I have this instant learned from your father, that you are at Stanton; and I write this hurried line merely to say, that I hope the day after it reaches you, to enjoy the same good fortune myself. I do not propose, however, to make any demand on James's hospitality on this occasion, nor shall I dispute the possession of my own old manor-house with the rats and mice, as I shall be staying at the house of a friend in

the neighbourhood. I have scribbled this merely that you may not be too much surprised when I make my appearance. With kind regards to Lady Juliana and my unknown nephew, believe me, my dear child, most affectionately yours,

"WALTER HARRINGTON."

The aunt and the nephew looked rather blankly at each other, after the perusal of this very simple document, and they would both of them, probably, have been very glad had the seal been still unbroken; for, notwithstanding the undoubted fact that letters do sometimes miscarry, there would be something awkward in Mr. Harrington's finding on the morrow that his letter had not been received; nor would the matter be rendered more easy by the necessity of their assuming an appearance of great surprise themselves, at his arrival. Moreover, James felt considerable fear lest his aunt's discretion should not stand the severe trial which thus awaited it, for which fear he had certainly sufficiently cause from her present demeanour; for she already began to fidget, and colour violently, under the consciousness of the act she had

sanctioned; nor did she fail to remind her uncomfortable-looking nephew that she had said she would have nothing to do with it.

They both felt, however, that the deed was done, and all that was left them in their distress was the recollection, that if they faithfully kept their own secret, there was nobody else who could betray it. So the letter was immediately destroyed, and the noble aunt and reverend nephew, having agreed to forget all about it as soon as possible, began to discuss the very puzzling question, as to where it could be that Mr. Harrington had resolved upon taking up his residence.

The only gentleman's house in the little village itself, with the exception of the unoccupied old manor-house, or indeed, in the immediate neighbourhood, was the dwelling inhabited by a Mrs. Cross, the widow of the late incumbent of a neighbouring parish, and her daughter. Now, it was very possible, that as the departed Mr. Cross had held his living for many years, his widow might have been an old acquaintance of Walter's; and though it certainly seemed rather strange that he should

prefer going to her house, instead of coming to that of his nephew, they soon came to the conclusion that it was there he was going.

"If we are right in our guess, James, Mrs. Cross will be sure to tell me that she is expecting him, if I walk over and pay her a visit. And then, you know, there will be no need of—of—of our seeming to be surprised, you know, and all that awkward sort of thing, when he comes over to call here."

"Yes! that is very true. And you can certainly go to call on Mrs. Cross, aunt, if you like it. Only take care that you do not tell *her*, instead of letting her tell *you*. That would be a terrible mistake, you know; so pray, be careful. It must be almost time for me to be off to church. But I dare say now, aunt Juliana, that you did not even know that it was a red letter day?"

Lady Juliana looked for a moment as if she was in great danger of becoming sick or faint; an effect which every allusion to what she called Popish observances, was very apt to produce upon her. She rallied, however, sufficiently to put on her bonnet and shawl,

and to set off resolutely and alone to visit her old acquaintance, Mrs. Cross; while the reverend James proceeded to recite, as pompously and unintelligibly as he could, the service of the day to his clerk, and about half a dozen old pensioners, who depended greatly upon donations from the hand of their priest from the parish oblations, for their snuff or their tea.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Cross's dwelling was a very picturesque sort of cottage. It was not a cottage *ornée*, which means the species of residence that has been described as the fitting abode for the devil's darling vice, "the pride that apes humility;" but it was an ornamented cottage, that is to say a *real* cottage, which by means of a little expense, and a good deal of taste, had been cleverly converted into a pretty and comfortable dwelling for a ladylike mother and her daughter. There was certainly a little affectation in the name which Mrs. Cross had given to this snug little residence, for she called it "The Widow's Rest;" but, excepting in the name, there was no

affectation of any kind about the cottage; it looked like the dwelling of nice, respectable people—and the in-dwellers there were nice, respectable people. The departed Mr. Cross had been a very low-church clergyman, in the days when Calvinism, in its most offensive form, was much more frequently found in our country churches than it is at present. Predestination, election, and reprobation, were the cardinal points of his creed, and these were the features in God's government of the world, on which he best loved to dwell. For the rest, he had been as good a man as it was well possible for any man to be, holding such tenets. But it is difficult to keep the heart widely open to all gentle charities, and awake to all kindly sympathies, when the mind is firmly persuaded that nineteen-twentieths of our fellow-creatures are doomed by unerring justice to eternal torture; and the late Mr. Cross would have felt any denial of this doctrine, to partake of the nature of personal offence to himself, as well as being a deadly sin of the very highest degree, and worst quality.

His good little widow, who had always looked up with exceeding reverence to her husband,

as the best, the wisest, and especially the most learned of men, held fast to his doctrine, both as the sole anchor of salvation in the world to come, and as a sort of dignified reminiscence of the proudest days of her life, in the world that was. As the widow of so very learned a divine, she felt that she did herself honour by holding fast to the doctrines which he had taught, although they were no longer very common among those around her; but she seemed to consider these extreme opinions as a work of caste, and at the same time as a very sacred deposit from her departed spouse.

The doctrines of her terrible faith, however, influenced very slightly her individual feelings towards her fellow-creatures. Her woman's heart was too warm, and her woman's head too weak, to permit of her establishing any logical or consistent relation between her principles and her practice. She would have tenderly watched the sick bed, and gently soothed the last moments of those whom her theological self firmly believed were passing from their death-bed to eternal fire; nor did she make the least scruple of enjoying a cheerful cup of tea with unregenerate wretches, whom the fore purpose of

God had doomed to inevitable perdition from the beginning of the world.

This well-meaning and truly kind-hearted little woman had one only child—a daughter—who had already reached twenty-five years of age. She was tall and well made, and called extremely handsome by those who admire a full development; those who find beauty only in more fragile grace might be inclined to apply to her the disagreeable epithets of "stout," and "coarse;" but for all that, Olivia Cross was a very handsome girl. She had large and very brilliant dark eyes; she had a remarkable abundance of long, thick, but rather coarse black hair, and she had a magnificent set of large, beautifully white teeth, which were fully exhibited between coral lips, of by no means diminutive dimensions.

The *morale* of Miss Cross corresponded very accurately to the style of the *physique*. Her whole nature was vigorous and powerful; her opinions, feelings, passions, were all strong; nor was her intellect weak, though energy, rather than discipline, was the characteristic of her mind; and a very defective education had permitted all her vigorous nature to develop

itself as best it might in that tumultuous and confused manner, which in strong and ill-regulated natures is sure to produce contradictory and unsatisfactory results. It was very natural, therefore, that Miss Cross should be a much less popular person than her more gentle mother. The same religious tenets worked worse on her stronger intellect and sterner nature; moreover, the fact that although she had completed her twenty-fifth year, she was still Miss Cross, operated unfavourably on her mind and character. She was by no means well calculated to endure or adorn a state of single blessedness; on the contrary, a very decided propensity to the tender passion had caused her to plunge into every possible flirtation that came in her way. And this sin of flirtation is especially one of those in the commission of which one person may steal a horse with impunity, while another may not look over the hedge without being exposed to very vehement reprobation.

With one of nature's delicate pet pieces of handiwork, this sin may only be commented upon as "pretty Fanny's way;" but our vehement Miss Cross, with her eager eye and

energetic manifestations, did not "do her spiriting gently" in that line. In fact, these doings did not always group prettily with her often strongly-expressed theological sentiments, so that on the whole poor Miss Cross got a good deal of abuse, and not a little quizzing, in the small quiet world of Stanton Parva. And yet, after all, Olivia Cross was by no means devoid of good qualities. She was warm-hearted and friendly, and most cordially seconded all her mother's little doings, in the way of helping her poor neighbours, and was ever ready with activity of heart, hand and foot, in the service of anybody to whom such an exertion would be a kindness.

And yet the poor dreaded the sight of the managing Miss Olivia crossing their thresholds; and there were, probably, two to one of these whom she had endeavoured to serve, who would have been more apt to complain of her officiousness, than to be thankful for her assistance.

For the most part, the mother and daughter passed their days and years in greater harmony than might have been expected from their very different characters. Olivia loved her mother,

and was always kind, though not always respectful to her; while on the other hand, the little widow dearly loved her tall daughter, though she was constantly plaguing her with a sort of good-humoured teasing, which meant little or nothing on the part of the cheerful old lady, but which did not always fall so lightly on the hot spirit of the younger one; and when Olivia lost her temper, her little mother felt a good deal afraid of her.

* * * *

When Lady Juliana reached "The Widow's Rest," she was so fortunate as to find both the ladies at home. Olivia was in the parlour, very busily engaged, though with a divided attention —one half of her spirit being occupied by cutting out a polka from rather a becoming pattern, and the other half being given to the perusal of a recently published tract, entitled "Grace before Baptism."

Mrs. Cross was in the garden, but at no great distance from the house, busily engaged in tying up her abounding sweet peas.

"Ah! Lady Juliana," exclaimed the old lady, on seeing her noble visitor approach, "this is indeed very kind of you. How are you all at

the Rectory? But walk in—pray walk in," and Mrs. Cross threw hospitably open the French windows of her pretty sitting-room.

Lady Juliana entered, and Miss Cross rose to receive her, with a huge pair of scissors in one hand, and her book in the other, saying, with very courteous eagerness:

"How do you do, Lady Juliana? How is Miss Kate?"

"Ah! my dear Miss Cross," replied her Ladyship, "would that the poor benighted child would take a lesson from you!—your life is an example. You are redeeming the time, I see, as usual."

"I am striving to get some edification," replied the young lady, showing her book, "and I have often got to steal time for doing so, from what I am forced to employ on the pomps and vanities of this wicked world."

"Ah! my dear, we have all our trials! If it were not that my path of duty, as you know, had been plainly marked out for me among the great ones of the earth, I often think that I could wish never to move in my own elevated sphere again. But He knows what is best for us."

"And to the holy, we know that all things are holy," rejoined the handsome Olivia, meaning, probably, in the inmost recesses of her secret thoughts, pea-green silk polkas included. "But have you seen this admirable new work, dear Lady Juliana?" she added, displaying the Rev. Mr. Sampson's recent publication on "Prevenient Grace," and having allowed her Ladyship to examine the title-page, she added in a tone of considerable authority, "it is, in truth, a most sustaining and comfortable protest against the soul-destroying formalism that is so fearfully growing up amongst us."

"Alas! my good young lady," returned Lady Juliana, with a deep-drawn sigh, "how is it likely that I should be blessed by the sight of any such book as that at Stanton Rectory? You know what James is. Most truly may we call him a blind leader of the blind. God knows, my dear Miss Olivia, that he is a blind leader, if ever there was one. There is not a single book, that can be considered as really profitable to the soul in the whole house; and I really believe if he found one, he would burn it. He has loads and loads of those odious big volumes, written in the dreadful days when Popery was rampant,

and when God was not known in the world. If ever I do venture to cast my eyes on a new book, it is sure to be the life of some Popish saint or other, with the title printed in red, and a fearful idolatrous sign of the cross in the title-page. Is it not dreadful to see such sights in a Christian-reformed country?"

Old Mrs. Cross had followed her visitor through the open window, with her little gardening basket in her hand, and looked inclined to welcome her as cheerily as if she had not believed that the vast majority of her fellow-creatures were doomed to eternal flames, and had been so for innumerable ages before they were born; and not even the dolorous tones of her Ladyship had as yet chased the hospitable smile from her face; her daughter, therefore, who felt conscious that her demeanour was not in keeping with the tone of their noble visitor, thought it advisable to say: "Lady Juliana, mamma, is complaining of the want she finds at the Rectory of some reading, comfortable to the soul. Don't you think we might be able to lend her something that might be a consolation and a redeeming of the time? I am sure you would be delighted to lend her any of your own good books."

"Certainly, my dear," replied the old lady, "all my small stock shall be at her Ladyship's service."

"Many thanks, my dear Madam, for your kindness. Alas! dear Mrs. Cross, you know only too well in what a howling wilderness of soul-destroying formalism and idolatry we live in this unhappy parish," returned the visitor. "My poor unhappy nephew seems, I grieve to say it, more and more left to himself every time I see him, and it is quite plain to me that he is being led on nearer and nearer towards the worship of antichrist! It is a sad, sad, spectacle! I wish much he could have the opportunity of conversing with some of the Lord's own. Even his father, Dr. Harrington, though very far from being a shining light, would be greatly shocked, I am sure, if he were to hear all I could tell him of his son's unfaithfulness. Indeed, I cannot but think that it would be a very desirable thing for some member of his family to come here for a little while, just to see and hear the manner in which he is going on."

Lady Juliana flattered herself, that in saying this she very skilfully gave the conversation a turn which must infallibly elicit from Mrs.

Cross, the avowal that she expected Mr. Harrington, if such, in truth, was the real state of the case; but Mrs. Cross gave no sign of having any such important observation to communicate, and only replied with a sigh:

"Oh, poor young man! It is indeed most melancholy to think that he never writes a sermon without having the evil spirit of antichrist dictating every word."

"And what fearful sermons they are!" groaned Lady Juliana. "I heard him preach one when I was here last. It was more like a heathen lecture then anything else."

"And yet," said Miss Cross, in her fine clear voice, and with her earnest manner, "it is often borne in upon me that Mr. Harrington is not a brand reserved for the burning, and that the Lord will in His own good time stretch out His hand and bring him home."

"I am sure, my dear young lady, it is very charitable in you to have such kind thoughts of him, but I am sorry to say that he seems to me to be back-sliding more and more every time I see him. Think of his keeping all the soul-killing Romish fasts and festivals, as he calls them. He does, indeed! Not a single

atom of meat is to be seen in the house on a Friday. And just fancy his making a point of insulting me, by saying grace before and after dinner in Latin."

"No cast-away ever went farther from real righteous grace than he does at present. I am quite ready to admit that," said Miss Olivia, with decision. "But, nevertheless, there are so many cases of sudden regeneration on record, that I think it would be wrong, and unholy, to conclude from any man's conduct and character, be they what they may, that he is not one of God's elect. And I confess that whenever I have had an opportunity of conversing with Mr. Harrington, it has always been strangely borne in upon my mind, that so it may be with him. Upon all those occasions—and they have occurred repeatedly—I have felt a sort of improving conviction that it has perhaps been written that I may be the humble means of leading him to the waters of life. And, oh, Lady Juliana! To think of the glory, the triumph of bringing such a sheep into the fold."

This burst was very enthusiastically uttered by this energetic young lady, and there was the least possible shade of distance and reserve in the tone with which Lady Juliana replied:

"Indeed, Miss Cross, my nephew ought to be very grateful for the holy interest you express for him. But I am sorry to say that I cannot share your hopes of his regeneration. If you had the same opportunities of knowing his condition that I have, and saw how all his opinions and practices lean towards Romish idolatry, I think you would be less sanguine."

"Most certainly," said old Mrs. Cross, "many of his ways in church are nothing but rank, downright Romanism, and particularly painful, I may truly say, to a mother in Israel like myself, who has received the tradition of the faith from a shining light of better days. For instance, you know, he turns right round in the reading-desk to bow to the Lord's table every time His holy name is mentioned in the course of the service, and this obliges us, you know, to turn round short the other way every time he does it, in order to protest solemnly against joining in such shocking idolatry, and as our pew faces the altar, we have got to turn to the great church door. It is very disagreeable, as you will easily believe, my Lady."

"It is dreadful, very dreadful!" rejoined Olivia, "yet still I say again that God's grace

may change all that, in the twinkling of an eye."

"But he has got so many shocking ideas," resumed Lady Juliana. "One of them, you know, is that no priest, as he chooses to call a Church of England clergyman, can lawfully take a wife. The Pope himself could not maintain the absolute necessity of the celibacy of the priesthood more strenuously than my nephew James does. He says positively that a priest is not fit to do his duty in a parish, if he is married."

"Lord be merciful unto us!" ejaculated the old lady, very devoutly; "and may He control the rampant power of the Evil One, or we shall see the days of Smithfield fires again!"

Miss Cross coloured violently as she listened to this statement of Lady Juliana; but did not attempt to say a word in defence of her *protégé*, on this point. Whether her emotion arose from her thinking that this last sin put him beyond the reach of grace, or from a fluttering hope at her heart that she might herself be the chosen instrument ordained by Providence to cure him of this most frightful heresy, is uncertain; but it is not uncertain that the sharp

eyes of Lady Juliana detected the blush, and that she felt a sort of instinctive appreciation of its significance with an acrimonious feeling of contempt and resentment towards the young lady, greater perhaps than any which the reverend advocate for celibacy himself could have experienced on the occasion.

Moreover, she was vexed at having failed in the object of her visit, so that it was not in a very amiable frame of mind that she rose in order to bring it to a conclusion, saying, as she did so: "But now I must wish you good morning, ladies; for I must hasten back to my charge. I can assure you it is no sinecure, Mrs. Cross, to have the entire care of such a young person as my niece. Young ladies, at their first coming of age, must be sharply looked after, as I dare say your own recollections of some years back can tell you. Good morning! Good morning, my dear Miss Cross!" And with these words, and rather a stiff bow, her Ladyship retreated through the still open window.

"What a pleasant, neighbourly sort of person her Ladyship seems to be; and quite one of

the Lord's people, which is always a recommendation," said the old lady, innocently.

"Neighbourly!" exclaimed Olivia, with evident marks of disgust. "I wonder, mamma, how you can fancy any such thing. If I am not very particularly mistaken, there is more pride and aristocratic insolence hidden under Lady Juliana's religion, than is to be found in many a professed worldling. I must say that there is something about her very particularly disagreeable to me. She is no more to be compared, in any respect, to her nephew, poor stray sheep that he is, than our cottage is to Brandon Abbey."

"But, my dear Olivia! is it right to speak and think so, when the aunt is a professor, and the nephew a cast-away—surely a brand set apart for burning!"

"Wait the Lord's time, mother," replied Olivia, eagerly. "Wait the Lord's time; and see if there is not more joy over one such sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine such folks as Lady Juliana!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MEANTIME, that noble lady reached the Rectory at a slow pace, and with a discouraged spirit; but news awaited her there, which in some degree restored her good humour, or at any rate restored her to as near an approach to good humour as it was in the nature of her temper to permit. Kate, who saw her approach, met her at the door as she entered.

"Whom do you think we shall have here to-morrow, aunt?" she said, eagerly. "See if you can guess!"

"I am sure I shall not waste my time in any such childish and sinful idleness as guessing," replied her Ladyship, with demure crossness, colouring however at the same time

with surprise, and also perhaps from the consciousness of her own duplicity. "If you really have anything to tell me," she added, "do it at once, if you please, with the decent sobriety of a Christian young woman."

Thus adjured, and her little outbreak of light-heartedness effectually quenched by her aunt's cold-water reception of it, Kate gravely replied: "My Uncle Walter is coming, aunt! He will be here to-morrow. Old Margery has been here from the Hall. She had a letter from my uncle this morning, telling her that he was coming into this neighbourhood, and telling her too that she was to put the old house into something like order, as he wished to go over it, and ascertain what sort of state it is in."

The communication of this piece of news was decidedly a great relief to Lady Juliana, as she had felt many uneasy doubts as to her power of satisfactorily acting the part, which she had thought she should have to perform on the arrival of Mr. Harrington. But she wanted, if possible, to hear some further particulars respecting this visit.

"Did the old woman show you the letter?" said she.

"No," replied Kate, "she did not bring it with her. But I believe there was nothing in it."

"And he said that he was coming into the neighbourhood?" said Lady Juliana. "Very odd, I think, that he should neither come here nor to the Hall. What house can he be coming to, I should like to know? It is very odd!"

"And still more odd, aunt, is it not," replied Kate, "that he should have written only to Margery, and not a line to any of us?"

"He probably ordered Margery to let us know about it, and thought that would be sufficient," replied Lady Juliana, with an air of great indifference. "Is the old woman gone back again?"

"Oh yes! she would not stay a moment. She was in such a bustle, she said, about opening all the windows, and dusting, and sweeping, and all the rest of it," replied Kate.

James, meantime, had met the old woman hastening back to her duties, as he returned from church, and learnt from her the news, which he too was obliged to receive with an affectation of surprise.

When he met her, he was walking with a

Mr. Brandling, who was his great disciple and ally in the parish, and they were in deep and very interesting consultation. Mr. Brandling was a master carpenter, and was one of those men, who are occasionally found now and then, whose natural taste and artistic perceptions lead them to elevate a mechanical trade into an art. The study of the fine specimens of wood-work preserved from past ages was his chief delight. Churches and church architecture, had accordingly become a passion with him, and this study had made Mr. Brandling, as it had made many another man, a staunch disciple of high-church principles as well as high-church architecture. Whether grace comes before baptism, at the moment of baptism, or immediately after baptism, the ingenious carpenter did not very anxiously inquire; but he had extremely strong opinions on the heterodox tendencies of the practice of dividing a church into penfolds, called pews, instead of open seats. Moreover, though but little conversant with the particular points upon which some have fallen off from the purity of the primitive doctrine, Mr. Brandling did not hesitate to attach his faith to that section of the Church—now, alas! more than

ever militant—which preferred open timber roofs to whitewashed ceilings.

The subject of conversation between the high-church Rector and the high-church carpenter, at the moment they met old Margery and her news, was the alarmingly great expense of removing the present hideous reading-desk and pulpit, and erecting something less obnoxious in their stead.

"A goodly, well-carved eagle lectern would, I am afraid, cost more than you dream of, Sir," were the words just uttered by Mr. Brandling at the moment they were stopped by the old woman; and as these words were very important words, the carpenter repeated them again as soon as she had passed on.

"I hear you, Brandling! I hear you," repeated the Rector, with a sigh; "and I suppose then it must be given up."

The carpenter sighed too, but answered not a word, for he had nothing cheering to say; he knew in his conscience that only a tolerably handsome carved eagle, would decidedly cost more money than the parish would choose to give, and for a moment or two the sympathising pair walked on in silence.

But then the Rector made a halt, and suddenly turning round upon his companion, he said:

"Brandling, why should I not apply to my Uncle Walter to help me in this? He is the Squire of the parish, you know, and less than a hundred pounds from him would set us all right, wouldn't it? I'll certainly try. And, I say, Brandling, just look in this evening with a rough estimate, and two or three of those designs for lecterns we were looking at the other day."

"Yes, Sir, I will," returned the carpenter; "and I was thinking, Sir, that it would be a great thing," he continued, if we could manage a fald-stool for the litany at the same time. I could contrive something elegant, in the right style, at no great cost; and if old Mr. Harrington has any taste for church matters, Sir, he never would make any difficulty about a few pounds, more or less."

"Well! we will see about it, Brandling. But the want of money is not the only difficulty we have to contend against. We live in times when much care is needed, even in well-doing." And with these words, and a nod, he parted from his companion, and entered the par-

sonage, perfectly well satisfied with the efforts he had made, and was about to make, in the cause of religion, and deeply convinced he was doing his duty while permitting his exertions to obtain a lectern and a fald-stool to obliterate from his memory all thoughts concerning the having surreptitiously opened and read a private letter addressed to another, together with all the lies, active and passive, necessarily consequent upon it.

But after all, perhaps, there was nothing very much out of the common way in the character of the Reverend James Harrington. He was a man of some taste, but little sense; a narrow mind, though not devoid of imagination; of a cold and selfish heart, though endowed with a feeling approaching to something like veneration; and with a good deal of learning, though marvellously little information. Men of this stamp are by no means very uncommon.

CHAPTER XV.

Brandon Abbey could scarcely be called a *picturesque* pile of building, yet it was eminently *historique*. The two terms are often confounded, but their meaning is by no means the same. The difference is as great as that so lucidly expressed by Sidney Smith, when he said that the rector's horse was beautiful, and the Rosinante of the curate picturesque. An *historique* edifice suggests ideas of all that we hear called the Romance of History. Not however that historic reminiscences are confined to antiquated buildings. They furnish but a narrow field for the Romance of History. All that recalls a particular epoch, or a certain phase of man's past existence is *historique*. The style of a work of art—the mode of a dress—a gallery of antique portraits. Do they not all carry with them an entire phantosmagoric panorama of the days that are gone?

And such was the case with Brandon Abbey.

The ancient building, which had originally borne that name, had indeed perished in the civil wars of the Rebellion, and the impoverished heir of the ruined Cavalier who had possessed it in the time of Charles I, had, like many others of his compeers, preferred spending what was remaining with him of the family property, in the gay revels of London under Charles II, to making a desperate attempt to restore the old family mansion.

The next in succession thought it better to share the chances of James II's sinking fortunes, than those of his own ruined father, who, bankrupt alike in purse, health, and character, was left to die of disease and poverty in London. And so ended the once proud line of the Moultrams of Brandon.

The place, and the neglected property round it, was bought at a marvellously cheap rate by a lucky speculator, who sold it again at a greatly advanced price, a few years afterwards, to Sir Joseph Mansveldt, a newly-created baronet, and a countryman of King William III; and it was to this gentleman's wealth and ambition that the Brandon estates were indebted for once again

having a mansion attached to them. It was because the new Brandon Abbey—for it still retained its venerable name—betrayed in every part of it such unmistakeable marks of its Dutch origin, that we have declared it to be less *picturesque* than *historique*. It would be difficult to conceive any imaginable building more unlike all that we are apt to associate with the idea of an abbey, than was this wide-spreading mansion of Lord Goldstable's.

The square compactness of the red brick *façades*, the heavy stateliness of the balustraded roof, and the perfect regularity of its low, answering wings, had altogether a strong savour of orthodox Protestantism about them, amply sufficient to warrant the staunch principles, both in Church and State, of the above-mentioned Sir Jacob Mansveldt.

These peculiar characteristics are certainly not those of architectural beauty; nevertheless, those whose sympathies are not all bespoken for one style of art only, might find somewhat to admire in a structure whose vast extent gave it one indisputable element of grandeur, and which incontestably offered an exceedingly perfect and magnificent specimen of its peculiar class and epoch.

Moreover, Brandon Abbey was fortunate in the nature and features of the surrounding country. The stiff formality of the huge pile, which had been the delight and pride of Sir Jacob Mansveldt, was wonderfully mitigated and softened in its effect by a surrounding landscape of such rich woodland scenery as only England, and England in her most favoured districts, can show. Fortunately, the sudden decampment of King James saved the magnificent oaks of Brandon from the axe. The political crash had precipitated the impending crash of the Moultram fortunes by a year or two, and the place was sold with the old oaks still standing, and there they were standing yet, when Lord Goldstable came into possession of the place.

Of the interior of Brandon Abbey we shall not say much; those who have ever seen a specimen of that style and date—and there are still many such in England—will have no difficulty in forming for themselves a sufficiently accurate notion of it; and it will be enough to say that most things within the house were very much as they had been left by old Sir Jacob Mansveldt, and were accordingly but little calculated to render the place comfortably habitable

at the time it came into the possession of our young Lord Goldstable. If he wished, however, that this portion of his large inheritance should, be greatly admired by the guests he brought to visit it, he was singularly fortunate in the chance which made old Walter Harrington one of them.

It was on a lovely summer evening that his Lordship's new travelling chariot, which had accompanied him on the railroad, passed through the lofty iron park-gates of Brandon Abbey; and the beautiful woodland scenery of the park was showing itself in its greatest beauty. Both gentlemen were very earnestly engaged in contemplating the scene before them. The younger one was excited by the very natural curiosity of beholding, for the first time, a noble property of which he was the fortunate owner, and really had, as he looked around him, considerably more speculation in his eyes than could be found in their glances on ordinary occasions. "All this is mine," was the prevailing idea which occupied his mind, naturally enough, certainly, and it was so pleasant a one, that he evidently was enjoying himself exceedingly.

To the elder, the scene was productive of far different and greatly more varied emotions.

Few romantic youths or landscape-loving maidens of sweet eighteen, could be found as keenly awake to the beauties of nature as was old Walter Harrington at near four-score. But it was not only pleasure, it was pious gratitude that he was drinking in, as he enjoyed the gentle holy influence of the calm and lovely landscape. Nor was this all. It was not only present pleasure that he enjoyed, but the sweet memories of many that were past. To him every glade and thicket of Brandon woods was familiar as if this day had been but the morrow of his last truant wandering among them. Nor was the long vista of years through which he looked back upon those joyous hours a blank. To Walter Harrington, this retrospect was not one that could bring pain. The old naturalist had passed neither a sinful nor unprofitable life, and he had no foregone regrets to cast a shadow over the brightness of his present feelings. Yet, nevertheless, there was a sort of sober, though not sombre solemnity which mixed itself with his enjoyment, and kept him silent.

At length they reached the first pair of huge iron gates, which opened upon the splendid avenue which led to the house. They found

them widely open, and the post-boys—for his young Lordship had been met by four post-horses at the station—proceeded to display the gallop, which they have not even in these unposting days forgotten, as the necessary preliminary of approaching their employer's mansion. This sudden acceleration of speed caused the old gentleman to rouse himself from his delightful reverie; and after looking back for a moment to the gates through which they had passed, he exclaimed:

"How often I have scaled those fine old gates that we have just dashed through!"

"Scaled them? No; you don't say so! Have you, indeed?" cried Lord Goldstable. "What could have made you do it, Mr. Harrington? What could you have wanted inside them?"

"Why, I don't think I much wanted anything inside them," replied the old man, laughing. "You know, my Lord, I told you that this fine old park had been a sort of half-forbidden playground to my brother and myself, some sixty years since, or so. And I suspect, that the incitement to the grand feat of clambering over the great avenue gates was made up partly of the especial sweetness of passing

precisely where no passing was allowed, and partly of the pleasure of doing what my companion, I mean my young brother Harry could not do. But here we are already at the stately steps of your mansion; and there, if I do not mistake, is a face I ought to know. I am sure I remember that old man when I was here last. Let us see if he knows me?"

The person thus alluded to had been gate-keeper at the park for many years, unchanged by the change of its masters; and his father had been gate-keeper before him in the days when the Rector's two sons had made Brandon woods their holiday resort.

But the remembrance to which Walter now alluded was not of so ancient a date, referring only to the time when he had made a short visit to his own property soon after he had come into possession of it.

Nor was this old man the only domestic who now stood uncovered on the steps, awaiting the arrival of their new and unknown master.

Lord Goldstable had given notice of his intended visit by a letter to his steward, announcing also that he should be accompanied by a friend for whose accommodation, as well

as for his own, all necessary preparation must be made; and this important functionary, as well as the old gate-keeper, now stood in readiness, and with no small portion of curiosity, to await the carriage, whose approach had been announced by more than one scout.

The newly-appointed steward, who was by no means an old man himself, while receiving, hat in hand, and with a profound obeisance, the two gentlemen as they descended from the carriage, was not a little astonished at perceiving that the friend of his master, instead of being, as he had naturally anticipated, some gay young man of his own time of life, was a venerable-looking old gentleman approaching four-score; and it is just possible, that Mr. Jenkins might have better liked to see in that position some blooming inexperienced youth, than one whose appearance seemed to announce something much more like a Mentor and a guide, than a boon companion.

Old Simmons, the gate-keeper, bowed low to his new master; and instantly recognized his venerable companion as he did so. Whereupon he exclaimed:

"Sure, your honour, I can't be noways mis-

taken! Sure, this is Mr. Harrington of the Hall, at Stanton?"

"No mistake at all, Simmons," replied the venerable wanderer. "And I made no mistake about you, old friend! I knew you in a moment. And yet it is ten long years, Simmons, since I was last at Stanton."

"But for all that, your honour is just the same as ever you was! And it is a pleasure to look at you."

Meanwhile, two or three servants who had been promptly hired by the active Mr. Jenkins, were seen hurrying forward upon the steps to receive, and stare at their new master; and their salams, and "my lords," and all other assiduities, were not only abundantly administered, but all in the right direction; for there was no danger of their mistaking the aged commoner for the youthful peer to whom they were proudly conscious of belonging.

Yet somehow or other it soon seemed, notwithstanding all these manifestations, that the principal portion of genuine deference and respect fell to the share of nature's nobleman, rather than to the brilliant creation recorded in the peerage. This might in some degree per-

haps have been occasioned by the discovery of the fact that Walter was the representative of one of the oldest families in the county; and this is a claim to respect still too strongly felt in rural districts to fail of producing its effect even beside the newly-arrived splendour of the newly-created nobleman. London servants would doubtless have known better how to apportion their reverence, and Mr. Simpson, Lord Goldstable's "own gentleman," was not a little scandalized by perceiving that every servant in the house, excepting himself, evidently considered old Walter Harrington to be a greater man than young Lord Goldstable.

Mr. Simpson, indeed, had previously conceived a special dislike to the old gentleman, whose first appearance in his path had been made by knocking him up at six o'clock in the morning, and who, moreover, since this first offence, had created a still stronger feeling of dislike in the breast of this legitimate prime minister, by the extraordinary influence which he was acute enough to perceive the old man had acquired over his master.

As to Lord Goldstable himself, it is quite certain that his own feelings placed him on the

side of the party the most reverential in their demeanour to his strangely chosen new friend. He had gradually, from the first hour of Walter's unceremonious visit to him, conceived for him the deepest feeling of respect, of which he had ever been conscious; but this feeling was so blended with gratitude for the relief he had brought him from the terrible scrape he had got into, and also with a sort of confidential dependance upon his judgment and his goodness, (for not even silly Lord Goldstable could doubt the goodness of Walter Harrington,) that he felt a degree of comfort in morally leaning for support on his venerable companion, which made him feel himself more comfortably safe, and at ease while he was near him, than he had ever done before since the honours and responsibilities attending upon his having attained his majority had fallen upon him.

In truth, the old man might have exercised the most despotic control over every action, and pretty nearly over every thought of his young friend, had he been inclined to do so; for the poor youth seemed disposed to throw himself upon him in a manner which threatened a far greater degree of responsibility than the old

gentleman had bargained for. But there was something so really pitiable in the evident weakness of character of the young man, and in the utterly unfriended condition in which the total absence of any attached friend left him, that it was not in the nature of Walter Harrington to oppose anything like cold reserve to his advances, or to refuse him the counsel and guidance which he sought, and which it was so very certain that he wanted.

And so this strangely arranged *tête-à-tête* evening passed away in talk between the young host and aged visitor on many subjects connected with Lord Goldstable's future plans: as to whether he should make Brandon, or another large place which he possessed in the North, his future principal residence; whether he should rebuild, or only alter and ornament either of the two houses; and many other subjects of the same personally interesting kind; and before they parted for the night, it was decided that they should on the morrow give an hour or two to the thoroughly examining the place they were now in, within and without, in order to decide what degree of temptation there might be for expending a few thousands on its immediate embellishment.

CHAPTER XVI.

Long before the hour on the following day which had been fixed by Lord Goldstable for this critical examination of his mansion, Walter Harrington was up and away, upon another errand of far deeper interest.

Rather less than an hour's brisk walking in the delicious air of a fine summer morning brought the active old man to his native village of Stanton, by the well-known path across the fields so many hundred times trodden by him in the days of his boyhood. But not even the well-loved and freshly remembered aspect of the long ago familiar objects which he passed could now arouse his mind from the painful pre-occupation in which it was plunged. He was

about to see his darling Kate. But what was the greeting he brought her? How should he bear to look at her? How should he speak to her? How communicate the deplorable tidings which he brought?

It had been agreed between himself and his nephew, before he left London, that Henry should make still farther and fuller inquiries as to the whole life, habits, and character of Caldwell. The terrible visit they had made together to the den in Aylesbury Street, seemed to leave but little possibility for hoping that anything favourable could result from this farther inquiry concerning facts which already appeared to be proved upon such incontestable evidence; and Henry felt this so strongly when the commission was given him, that no feeling, less imperative than the reverence which he bore his uncle, could have induced him to undertake it; but either from a strongly hopeful temperament, or some other feelings that were at work within him, Walter still clung to the idea that it was *possible* they might have been mistaken as to the identity. And as he meditated upon this last chance, which he saw, or fancied he saw, might yet end favourably, he suddenly asked

himself whether it would be wise to inflict a pang which might, by possibility, prove needless? Would it not be better to defer a blow which was certain to destroy the bright hope of a long life's happiness? It might be difficult to say whether there was more strength or weakness shown in the old man's decision, not to mention the subject to Kate till he had received a further report from Henry. But at any rate it was so that he decided.

Walter was fortunate in the hour he had chosen for his visit, for it enabled him to see his beloved Kate alone. James was gone to the church to perform *matins*, in the presence of Mr. Churchwarden Brandling and three old women, to whom the Rector dispensed a daily basin of soup, on condition of their punctually attending all services at the church, and of their never, on any occasion, speaking of the said soup by any other appellation than their *dole*. There was one poor old soul indeed, who was hard of hearing, and she invariably called it her bowl; but fortunately for her, this terrible misnomer had never yet been uttered in the presence of any one who was not either too ignorant or too charitable to report it, and so

she went on receiving her bowl in reward for her prayers with great punctuality.

Lady Juliana was, of course, not absent in consequence of attending "matins;" she would have shuddered from head to foot at the idea of being guilty of such arrant Popery; but fortunately for Walter, she never left her room till a much later hour in the morning. So Kate was in the Rectory garden all alone, enjoying pretty nearly the only moments allowed her of freedom and tranquillity, and she employed this precious interval from annoyance in letting her anxious thoughts range at will as she strolled up and down the quiet shady path.

She had no idea of receiving a visit from her uncle so early in the day, and it was with a cry of glad surprise that she bounded to meet him, as he entered the garden from the breakfast-room window.

"My dear, dear uncle!" she exclaimed. "Oh! I am so very glad to see you! As usual, you are up with the lark, as cheerful, as cheering, but ten thousand times more welcome!"

"My dear, sweet Kate!" he said, taking her by both hands, and after giving her a kiss upon

the forehead, holding her at arms' length, and gazing in her face, he added: "I don't see any of the roses, Kate, that country air and early hours were commissioned to give you. I am afraid you have not been happy here, my dear child?"

"Not very, dear uncle," she replied. "The truth is, Uncle Walter, that somehow or other I do not get on so well with my Aunt Juliana now I am away from home. And then I am spoiled, you know, at home, by having that dear room up stairs all to myself. I don't think Aunt Juliana and I understand one another very well. And then James, too, is so odd in many of his ways; and altogether—in short, it is very, very different from being at home, especially since that home has had you in it."

"Poor little Kate! you shan't be left here long, dearest," said Walter, hopefully. "But where are they, Kate?—James and Lady Juliana, I mean—where are they?"

"My aunt, you know, is never early," she replied. "She will not appear down stairs for at least an hour later than this; and James is gone to church."

"Gone to church, my dear? Gone to church at this hour? What for?" asked the old man, very innocently.

"To perform the early service," she replied. "James has early prayers every morning."

"Really," said Walter, looking a good deal puzzled, "that does not look at all like what his father told me about him. I flatter myself that your papa is altogether mistaken about James; and I shall be glad to tell him so when I go back, for he really seemed to be very uneasy about him. Somehow or other, Kate," he continued, "your father has evidently taken up the idea, that James is one of the most slothful, idle, lazy young fellows, that ever lived! Now his getting up, and going to church so very early as this, clearly proves, I think, that my brother is quite mistaken in him. But do all the people here go to church every morning?"

"Oh dear, no!" replied Kate, smiling. "Of course not, Uncle Walter. I went to the early service yesterday to please James; but it made Aunt Juliana so exceedingly angry, that I would not venture to do it again to-day. There were not above four or five persons in the church

yesterday; but I do not think James would give it up, if nobody met him there, save dearly beloved Roger, the clerk. But the truth is, you know, dear uncle, that James is a regular Puseyite."

"Oh! brother James is a regular Puseyite, is he?" returned Walter, laughing. "Why, Kate, dear, who taught you to talk about *ites* and *isms?* Who taught you all this, you little seraphic doctor in petticoats? *La polémique ou va t'elle se nicher?* In my day, I should as soon have expected hearing the bench of bishops discussing feathers and flounces, as of hearing a girl like you, Kate, discoursing upon divisions in the Church. But, I dare say you know all about it, my dear, and are quite competent to instruct me; for you must know, though I suppose the confession will shock you, that till I arrived in England, a few weeks ago, I never had the good or ill-fortune to hear of a Puseyite."

"In truth, Uncle Walter," replied Kate, very gravely shaking her head, "I am greatly tempted to believe that your state is the more gracious. But we ladies of England, who live at home, are by no means permitted to live so

much at ease. We should be deaf, indeed, if we could avoid hearing the clash of polemical arms, even if we are prudent enough to keep ourselves out of the thickest of the fight; and even to do this is by no means a very easy matter."

"Well, Kate!" returned the old man, "I cannot but think, that this is one of the few points in which England has not changed for the better since the days of my youth. But in that, as in all other things, the change will, doubtless, ultimately lead to beneficial results. Meantime, however, I am really and truly very much behind the rest of the world; I must, therefore, entreat of you, good Doctor Katie, to enlighten me a little on the nature of this mysterious *ism*. What *is* a Puseyite?"

"Nay, uncle dear! who ever dreamed of asking a lady for a definition? In sober truth, Uncle Walter, I know wondrously little about the matter, though I hear a great deal," replied Kate. "But by what I can make out," she continued, "I believe that a Puseyite thinks that the world was in its prime of life somewhere about the year 1500, or thereabouts; and that it has been going down hill ever since.

I know that a proper Puseyite, thinks it far better to be a Roman Catholic than a dissenter; and that he wears a particular sort of waistcoat, generally made of black silk, pinned, without buttons, close under his chin. This, I know, is a very essential point. He does not talk much about religion, in the way that Aunt Juliana does; but discourses very much about 'the Church.' He is greatly inclined to love and reverence all kinds of ecclesiastical ornaments; and if anything of, or belonging to the church, has an old name and a new one, he seems to think it a point of duty to call it by the old one. He always fasts, as he calls it, on Fridays; that is to say, he eats no meat; but James, fortunately, seems to be exceedingly fond of fish, and makes a great point of having the very finest that can be procured; and it is, I suppose, a point of conscience with him to have it dressed in the best possible manner, for he makes quite as much fuss about *that*, as about any of his most favourite ceremonies. But there is some mystery about oil and butter, that I don't quite understand. I once paid him a visit in Lent, and then I heard a good deal about it; but I could never very clearly

make out the religious laws, by which the occasional substitution of the one for the other is regulated. And this is really and truly all I know about Puseyism, Uncle Walter, except a trifling peculiarity which I remarked in James's pronunciation of the word Catholic. He calls it *Cartholic*, with a strong emphasis on the first syllable. What this means I cannot guess; but I suppose it is intended to mean something."

"Admirably precise and satisfactory, my dear. And so my nephew James is one of these strange gentlemen, is he? It is to me a perfectly new variety of the species, and I shall be curious to talk to him. But I must now run away from you, my dear Kate," continued the old gentleman, drawing from his fob a huge old-fashioned watch, "I must now run back to Brandon without seeing either my reverend nephew or Lady Juliana; if I stay any longer, Lord Goldstable will be puzzled to guess what has become of me."

"Lord Goldstable! uncle?" cried Kate, colouring.

"God bless me, my dear love; I totally forgot that you are as yet in perfect ignorance as to my whereabouts in your neighbourhood. Now

don't look so frightened, Kate, and so very much as if you thought I was a deserter to the enemy. Not a bit of it, Kate. I am a true knight as surely as you are a lady fair. Yet, so it is, that I am positively a guest in the castle of the arch foe himself."

"You are staying with Lord Goldstable, at Brandon Abbey, Uncle Walter?" said Kate, in an accent of the most genuine astonishment. "Well! I confess this does surprise me."

"And no wonder," returned her uncle. "Perhaps I am a little surprised at it myself. We must presume, I think, that I am under the influence of some potent spell, which has been cast on me by this terrible young English baron. Nevertheless, you may depend upon it, that I shall come out from the contest with flying colours, as every bold defender of a distressed damsel always does, and ought to do—though I do not think it is quite *en règle* that the bold defender should be an old uncle. But never mind that, Kate; I shall deliver you from his power at last; nor will I take the red cross and march off to Palestine till I have done so."

"I wonder whether this aged uncle will ever be old enough to be serious?" returned Kate,

laughing. "But of one thing I am quite sure," she added, more gravely, as she affectionately took his hand, and held it between both hers, "whatever the mystery may be, the *dénouement* will not be an unhappy one, if you are one of the plotters."

"I trust so, my own dear Kate," replied the old man; but as he said so he felt a pang at his heart, as he remembered that the *dénouement* he had in store for her contained, at the very best, but a negative sort of blessing, as regarded his manœuvrings with Lord Goldstable, while he was still, as it were, holding suspended over her head a blow heavy enough to crush all her hopes of happiness. "But in truth, my Kate, I must be off," said he, fondly kissing her hands before he withdrew his own. "Tell me, before I go, when I may see you all? Do you think that, without indiscretion, I may volunteer to come over and drink tea with you this evening? And, Kate dear, if I find, which is extremely likely, that my good friend, Lord Goldstable, does not like to be left alone in his glory, in his old Dutch palace; in that case, Kate, I will bring him with me. But don't be alarmed; he shall be muzzled."

Kate coloured a little, and laughed a little, at the idea of such a visit; but she had almost as much confidence in the tact of her old uncle, as in his affection, and she very courageously declared herself ready to stand the encounter, provided her old champion-knight stood by to protect her. She ventured also to promise, on the part of her brother, the required amount of hospitality; and it was accordingly settled, that if no special message reached her to the contrary, he should make his appearance at the Rectory in the evening, accompanied by his noble host, provided the said noble host preferred making the visit, to remaining in the solitude of his own splendid mansion.

CHAPTER XVII.

Great, as may easily be imagined, was the astonishment of the Rector and Lady Juliana at learning from Kate, at the breakfast-table, that Walter Harrington was the guest of Lord Goldstable, and, moreover, that he proposed bringing his young Lordship to share the hospitalities of the Rectory tea-table, that evening.

James was really much too thoroughly a gentleman to feel any trepidation at the idea of so unceremoniously receiving an enormously wealthy peer in his modest home. The consciousness of being a Harrington, guarded him from any feeling of the kind; but even had it been otherwise, there was another element in the character of James Harrington which would very effectually have produced the same result.

With the most intimate and profound conviction of his whole heart and soul, he believed himself elevated, by the priestly character with which he was invested, far above the level of all peers, potentates, princes, or any other lay grandees whatever; no other relationships of man to man could be said to make itself practically felt by him; no other was really influential on his conduct in life, save only that between priest and layman. The relative position of youth to age, of simple to gentle, of poor to rich, were all swallowed up in the contemplation of the one great division of the world into *clerical* and *lay*.

Not the most exclusive Levite, not the most spotless Brahmin, not the most untarnished green-turbaned descendant of the Prophet, ever regarded his order with more pride of caste, or looked down from a more sublime height on those of the laity, than did James Harrington, the youthful Rector of Stanton.

The one cherished picture which ornamented the small but comfortable dining-room at the Rectory, was a representation of that celebrated scene at Canossa, where the offending Emperor, Henry IV, was made to stand for three days, bareheaded and barefooted, in the snow, waiting

till it should please Pope Gregory VII to admit him to his presence. And as the young "priest" of Stanton sate within sight of this edifying exemplification of the power of the Keys, it would have been difficult for any combination of persons, or of circumstances, to have shaken the lofty sense of dignified superiority derived from the conscious possession of the awful power to bind, and to loose.

But the spirit of ecclesiastic domination, like every other spirit, must operate according to the capabilities of the element it has to work in; and, accordingly, the same pretensions which made Hildebrand almost sublime in the audacious flights of his enormous self-assertion, served only to make the Reverend James Harrington *a prig*.

Of course nothing could be more abominable, disgusting, and disgraceful in his eyes, than the innovation which, in these back-sliding and degenerate days has permitted the arrangement which has placed so much valuable church preferment in the hands and in the gift of laymen; yet, nevertheless, it is not impossible that the satisfaction which he very decidedly felt at the idea of entertaining his noble, intended brother-

in-law in his parsonage, might have arisen from the recollection that this noble, intended brother-in-law had more than one capital good living in his gift.

No doubt, for a single instant, suggested itself to his mind as to the motive which had induced his Uncle Walter to become the guest of Lord Goldstable, and to give himself the trouble of so early a morning's walk in order to arrange the introducing the noble suitor to the Rectory with as little delay as possible.

It appeared so clearly evident to James that the old gentleman had been brought to perceive the great folly of opposing so very desirable a match for his niece, that he would scarcely have thought it worth while to ask him if it were not so, had they found themselves *tête-à-tête* together; and, moreover, it was quite clear, in his estimation, that he had not only withdrawn his opposition, but that he was putting himself very much out of his way to make amends for the mischief he had done by encouraging his over-indulged niece Kate in her absurd opposion.

He was, therefore, for more reasons than one, exceedingly well pleased at the prospect of this

offered visit; and he proposed to himself to receive the Squire of his own parish, and the man of the highest rank in his neighbourhood, in such a manner as should clearly set before their eyes the nature of their relationship to the Church as represented in his humble person; and moreover, he was certainly not without hopes that he might possibly, by the exertion of a little skilful management, obtain something in aid of the great object of his and Mr. Churchwarden Brandling's ambition, in the way of decoration for their beloved parish church.

The speculations of Lady Juliana, at hearing of this most unexpected arrangement between the head of the Harrington family, and the noble suitor of her undeserving but most fortunate niece, were more single-minded. She had no dreams about decorating churches, neither could she be said to have any definite hope of inducing her future nephew-in-law to bestow any of the preferment of which he was patron, upon any chosen vessel that she might recommend to him. She gave her entire thoughts to the proper womanly business of making the most of Lord Goldstable's visit, so as to render it evident to himself, as well

as to the wrong-headed Kate, that a marriage between them was a matter so decidedly fixed upon, as to render any notion of breaking the engagement too dishonourable, not to say disgraceful, for either party to fancy the doing so any longer possible.

Lady Juliana certainly hated Walter Harrington most heartily; nevertheless, she was too conscientious a person to deny, that he had acted in this very delicate and difficult affair with admirable acuteness and skill.

The reason of his being on a visit to Brandon Abbey, appeared just as obvious, and as much beyond the reach of doubt, to her, as it had done to her nephew James; and when they found themselves *tête-à-tête* together—a gratification which was easily obtained, by her Ladyship's telling the future peeress that, as the morning was fine, she would do well to take half-a-dozen turns up and down the gravel walk—they mutually wished each other joy at being thus admirably assisted by accident, in advancing the great object which had been entrusted to them.

"Nothing, certainly, could have been more fortunate, my dear James, than this Quixotic

whim of your queer old uncle! I dislike him exceedingly," she said. "I shall never deny that, under any circumstances—and most criminal should I hold myself to be, if I did so; for I have heard him utter sentiments so greatly unbecoming a Christian and a gentleman, that anything short of deep dislike would be a crime on my part. But on occasions of duty like the present, James, neither liking or disliking ought to have anything to do. Can we have a stronger proof of this than the trouble and inconvenience which the *dislike*, forsooth, of your sister, Miss Kate, has occasioned us? My sense of duty is imperative, James; and greatly as I dislike this old man, you shall perceive that I will be perfectly civil to him. As to Lord Goldstable, I certainly do feel a very considerable degree of family regard and affection for him already. He has shown, not only a tender heart, but very great good sense in this business. Though your father is not noble, James, your mother is; and you may take my word for it that this has had great influence with him, as most assuredly it ought to have."

"Yes, indeed! I think Lord Goldstable

has behaved extremely well in this business," replied James, taking advantage of a momentary pause in his noble aunt's harangue; "and I shall certainly receive him," he added, "with all the attention in my power."

"Of course you will, my dear James," she replied. "Both as the master of the house, and as the brother of the young lady whom he is about to marry, you owe him every attention! And, moreover, I think that upon this occasion, at least, both you and I are bound to treat Mr. Walter Harrington with rather more consideration than we can either of us think he deserves. But we both of us must approve the object which it is evident he has now in view, and our present object should be to stand on the best possible terms with him, for it is only by doing so that we can be able to further his present laudable object."

"Fear nothing from me on that point, my dear aunt," replied James. "I fully agree with you in thinking that my uncle's present conduct towards Lord Goldstable, is not only everything that it ought to be, but also that it is such as ought to make us forget, for the present at least,

all the many objectionable points which we are aware of in his character. Personally, indeed, I may consider myself as a stranger to him; for it is ten years—very nearly the half of my life—since I last saw him. But I confess that I have gathered enough information respecting his peculiarities, from my mother's letters, to convince me that he is in no way a person entitled to my respect, except in as much as he is the brother of my father, and in actual possession of the family estate. But at the present moment, I am quite ready to allow that he is something more. As patron of the living, I have a strong claim upon his assistance for the repairs of the church; and his present position, as the guest of Lord Goldstable, gives him an importance that decidedly ought to make us forget, for the time, all points of difference between us."

Lady Juliana's speculations and views respecting the expected visit, were much more single and unmixed than those of her nephew. She had no hopes of his patronage for any favourite chapel or church, though she was perfectly capable of feeling the value of such patronage, could it be obtained in the right

direction. But all she thought of on the present occasion, was that his coming was a masterly move in the great game which was to make herself the aunt of Lord Goldstable.

Walter Harrington was most assuredly a very special object of aversion and reprobation to her serious Ladyship, and the having to play the part of hostess to him for the evening, was to her feelings a very detestable task; but although it never entered into her contemplation to shrink from it on the present important occasion, it occurred to her that the evil might be alleviated by making a further addition to the family party. No sooner had this idea suggested itself, than she said to her nephew: "Do you not think, James, that it might be as well to ask the Crosses for this evening? It must be done some time or other, you know, while we are with you; and it might help to lessen the horrid bore of talking to Mr. Harrington, off our hands."

"But might there not be danger of—of dividing Lord Goldstable's attention?" suggested James. "Might not Miss Olivia—"

"My dear James, what *are* you thinking of?" exclaimed Lady Juliana, interrupting him

with evident displeasure, as well as impatience. "Danger that Olivia Cross should attract any man's attention? Surely you must be joking."

"Why I don't know, aunt. However, all that is much more in your province than in mine, and of course I should wish you to do exactly what you think best about it. Ask the Crosses by all means, if you wish it. If the danger to which I alluded is no objection, I certainly do not know of any other."

"Trust me," returned the scornful lady, with a most expressive curl of her lip, "trust me, James, you may make yourself perfectly easy upon that score; Miss Olivia will never do mischief of that kind to any one! I will therefore write the note immediately, if you please; and I dare say your man will find some village boy or other who will take it."

"Oh! there will be no difficulty about that, Lady Juliana. I will take care to send the note, if you will write it," returned the Rector, with very polite alacrity. And the note was immediately written, and dispatched accordingly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was at about eight o'clock, of a fine, warm, summer evening, that little Mrs. Cross and her tall, well-grown daughter, set off from "The Widow's Rest," in obedience to the above-mentioned note, to walk up the village street to the Rectory. The dress of the little old lady, consisting of a black silk gown, with a snow-white kerchief pinned across her bosom, and a most becoming little cap upon her head, was the very perfection of neatness. The dress of Miss Olivia was neither so simple, nor so easily described. The whole resources of her wardrobe had been put in requisition, to furnish forth her adornments upon this occasion. It was not, however, the expectation of meeting

Walter Harrington, though he was her mother's old acquaintance, and the Squire of the parish to boot; nor yet the still more exciting and extraordinary event of making the acquaintance of a young nobleman, possessed of eighty thousand a-year; it was neither of these remarkable events that constituted the principal interest of the invitation to poor Olivia. No! Alas! it was that servant of Anti-Christ, the Romanizing Rector himself, who caused all the vehement palpitations of that rebellious heart. Yes, it was indeed that glorious creature! that fallen angel! that precious brand, to be brought forth from the burning by the handsome Olivia herself, even as a drowning babe is brought out of the water by a faithful Newfoundland dog! It was, in short, that beautiful, though fearfully wicked Lucifer, in a stiffly-starched white neckcloth and silk cassock, for whose too dear sake all these floating ribbons, and bits of trinketry, had been put in requisition!

Alas! alas! poor, poor Olivia! The fatal truth will out. The Evangelical maiden loved the Puseyite parson. The perversities of Cupid will, probably, never end. He was wont of old to amuse himself by making high-born dames lose

their gentle hearts to squires of low degree, and Christian Caballeros captive to Moorish maidens. But what was that to the wilful, wicked *espièglerie* of filling the heart of a regenerate spinster with the cassock-clothed image of a Puseyite Rector? Surely not even Cupid himself can go beyond this in perversity.

As might naturally be expected under the circumstances, Mrs. Cross and her daughter were the first division of the expected party who arrived at the Rectory. They were received by Lady Juliana in a style compounded of aristocratic condescension, and that peculiar sort of cold quietism which the spiritual pride of "serious people" assumes in its efforts to ape humility. By Kate they were welcomed with simple and sincere cordiality. The Rector himself advanced one stately step towards them from the hearth-rug on which he had been standing. His slight gentleman-like figure was drawn up to its utmost height, apostolical dignity sat upon his brow, and he stretched out his white hand towards his visitors very much with the action and manner of a pontiff flinging forth his benediction on a kneeling multitude. He

controlled himself, however, sufficiently to say: "How do you do?" instead of "Benedicte!"

The guests from Brandon Abbey arrived shortly afterwards, and while Walter was making acquaintance with his reverend nephew, Lord Goldstable, after a somewhat blushing and embarrassed recognition of Kate, was receiving the outpourings of Lady Juliana's delights and felicitations on his arrival at Brandon. As soon as this was over, his Lordship was presented to Mrs. Cross and her daughter, with a whispered intimation from the noble aunt of the Rector, that they were the widow and daughter of a clergyman who had for many years held a living in the neighbourhood, and that they were very good people.

Lord Goldstable looked at Olivia's handsome face, tall figure, and well-formed bust, and certainly thought, in his heart, that she deserved a more complimentary introduction; he bowed low in return for the young lady's low curtsey, and immediately entered into such very friendly conversation with her, that Lady Juliana positively coloured with vexation as she remembered the tone in which she had rejected her nephew's

hint upon the possibility that the young peer might find her attractive.

It was not long before the party were invited, in country fashion, to place themselves around the well-spread tea-table.

Walter seated himself between Lady Juliana and his old acquaintance Mrs. Cross. Kate would fain have sat next her uncle herself, but Lady Juliana so imperatively motioned her to a chair between Mrs. Cross and Lord Goldstable, that no alternative was left her. But her Ladyship failed in her attempt to place Olivia between herself and James; for the audacious young lordling, who was evidently emancipating himself at a very rapid rate from the control of all old ladies, however noble, called out as he seated himself, with a very comfortable appearance of being quite at his ease, and in a tone of the most frank good-humour:

"Here is a seat, Miss Cross. Do come and take this chair between me and Mr. Harrington."

An arrangement to which, of course, the young lady could offer no objection, and she obeyed with a crimson blush and a sparkling eye, to the immense disgust of Lady Juliana.

"I must compliment you on the prettiness and good taste of your dining-room, James," said Walter, as soon as the party were seated. "Where did you get the carved oak of that chimney-piece? It assorts most admirably with your Elizabethan windows, and the style of your furniture. You did not get such carving as that at Stanton Parva, I presume? It is really admirable."

"Indeed it is a native production of Stanton Parva, my dear uncle," replied James, much pleased. "But not only the execution, but the design also is the production of a Stanton carpenter. He is, I do assure you, a genuine artist. His name is Brandling: he is a very worthy man, and moreover, he is my church-warden into the bargain."

"I shall be delighted to make Mr. Brandling's acquaintance," returned Walter; "but an introduction to Goldstable here would be more to the purpose just now. I think," continued the old man, addressing his new friend across the table, "I think, Lord Goldstable, that this Mr. Brandling would be just the man to intrust with the direction of the workmen who are to be employed in some of the

alterations we were planning this morning at the Abbey."

"Yes, to be sure, just the man," replied his acquiescent Lordship. "I should like to have such chimney-pieces as that in all the rooms."

James was in raptures at hearing this. There was something in Lord Goldstable's wholesale style of approbation, that seemed to promise the most enthusiastic patronage, not only of his friend Brandling, but of all spiritual as well as temporal mediævalism, and he already saw his petted church refitted and beautified at the hopeful young peer's expense; maybe a pleasant hope suggested itself that, perhaps, all the pauperism and poor-rates of the parish might be got rid of by means of a daily distribution of alms at the Abbey gates.

"And yet," pursued his youthful Lordship, innocently, after nibbling for a minute or two the biscuit he held in his hand, "I think, perhaps, that they would look better if they were made of marble, and had large looking-glasses over them."

The Rector fell from the height of his hopes plump into the dismal slough of disappointment.

Walter smiled quietly, but said gravely enough, even to satisfy his solemn-looking nephew:

"But tell me more about this village-carpenter, James. Is he really a self-instructed man? The design and finish of that carving seems to me to bear the stamp of a real artist."

"And he *is* a real artist, although a self-taught one, Uncle Walter," replied James, eagerly. "But the miracle is soon explained, my dear Sir. He has sought inspiration from the only genuine source of all that is truly beautiful—namely, the *Church*, Uncle Walter. He has found his teachers in the venerable remains which have come down to us from the ages which were ages of *faith*, and, consequently, were ages of heroism in virtue, and of beauty in art."

"You mean, I suppose," said Walter, after a little reflection, but looking, in spite of it, most completely mystified, "you mean that he copied that carving from some ancient work in the church?"

"I mean, my dear uncle," returned the Rector, with much solemn yet benevolent

dignity in his manner, "that the sound Church feeling of a better day can alone elicit that artistic excellence which we all know was produced among us when it was in the ascendant; and this lost artistic excellence can only be recovered in proportion, as we retrace the path of heresy, which this unhappy nation has been following for the last three hundred years."

These last words were delivered with an unction and a tone which called the attention of every member of the little party to the speaker.

Lord Goldstable, with a vague idea that the clergyman was preaching, whispered to Kate:

"Is your brother very strict, Miss Harrington?"

Lady Juliana turned her head away, half closed her eyes, and muttered in a tone not, perhaps, intended to be audible, the word "Blasphemy!"

"Little Mrs. Cross, in a voice equally subdued, exclaimed: "Heresy! Fiddlestick!"

Olivia gazed on the Rector with an expression in her large black eyes that was compounded of horror and admiration, the natural

result of the painful, yet fascinating, contemplation of the good gifts of comely young bachelorhood, united with so great spiritual abandonment.

Poor Kate looked vexed, and heaved a quiet sigh; but Walter was the only person present who attempted any direct reply.

"Heretical, or not heretical, my dear fellow," said he, "the path which the world has been walking in, as you say, for three hundred years, it will continue to walk in still, even if by so doing it may have to relinquish all chance of carved chimney-pieces. But, perhaps, all this may be Puseyism, James; for they tell me you are a great Puseyite. Is it so? eh?"

"A nick-name, Sir, can never fitly describe a great principle," replied the Rector, still preserving the tone of mild, though dignified authority. "But if by your question you mean to inquire whether, as a Priest of the Anglican branch of the Catholic Church, I am one of those who highly prize, and would jealously maintain, the privileges and authority of that Church, I answer most assuredly, Yes."

"You meant to say, I suppose, the Catholic

branch of the Anglican Church," rejoined Walter, after a short interval, apparently given to meditation on the meaning of what his reverend nephew had spoken.

"My dear uncle," he replied, appearing to be as much taken aback by the fearful extent of Walter's ignorance, as Walter himself had been by the startling statement of his own retrogressive notions, "I fear that you have never paid sufficient attention to the great questions which are now, alas! dividing our Church. I fear that you may not have read enough on this momentous subject to enable you to understand it rightly."

"No, indeed," replied Walter, "I do not understand it at all; and I should be well pleased to receive instruction on the subject. But, observe, James, I object in the very beginning to your *beau-idéal* of religion, as shadowed forth in your favourite model ages of some three centuries since."

"A little closer investigation of the present state of things, my dear uncle, might lead you to acknowledge the necessity of retracing the steps which have brought us to the position we now occupy," replied James. "Let me cite to

you a case which occurred in this parish the other day, as a specimen of things as they are. I was called upon to perform the burial service over the body of a person who, I had every reason to believe, had never been baptized. The rubric directs that the burial service shall not be performed for such. And as a priest, I am bound, in the most solemn manner that can regulate and bind the conscience of man, to obey the rubric. I, accordingly, refuse to bury the body. Whereupon the civil power steps in, with impious opposition to ecclesiastical ordinances, and without heed of, or reference to, the difficulties of the case, compels me, simply by superior force, to act in disobedience to the authority I am solemnly bound to obey. I put this case to your candour."

"And I," answered Walter, "have no hesitation in replying that such intervention of the civil power is a monstrous and unrighteous oppression."

"I am delighted, my dear uncle—" began the Rector, eagerly.

"But stop," interrupted Walter; "there are one or two things to be observed. Of course I do not meddle with the reasonableness, or the

righteousness, of the rubric; that is nothing to the purpose. Those who most object to it, must, nevertheless, see that you are bound to obey it. But it seems to me, James, that all the parties concerned are acting as unreasonably as the civil power of which you complain. The poor departed one, over whose body the civil and spiritual authorities are fighting their battle, why does he, or why do his friends for him, want you to bury him? If he received none of your ministration during life, why seek it after death? Then, as to the priest's side of the question, it strikes me that a truly believing and conscientious minister of the Church to which this rubric belongs, would not permit himself to be compelled by the civil power to disobey its ordinances. I admire your dining-room very much; but do you not think, James, that the endurance of a little martyrdom, mildly administered according to the fashion of the times, would be proof still stronger of reverence for the by-gone ages of faith, than carved oak and Gothic ornaments? But the simple fact is, my dear nephew, that a Church cannot accept its food and lodging from the State, or from State protection, without

becoming the servant of the State. It is just as monstrous that the State should interfere to coerce the consciences of the priesthood by compelling them to perform spiritual functions which their sworn faith forbids them to use, as that they should compel the laity to pay for spiritual ministrations which they do not value, or desire to receive."

"The Church holds a position, and claims a prerogative, my dear Sir, which ought to prevent any confusion between the authority of the civil power when backing and supporting that of the Church and the using that power, which in fact emanates from the Church herself, for the purpose of thwarting her."

"It does certainly appear, my dear James, that the Church, and the State, between them, have contrived to get themselves into a very awkward dilemma; the proof of which is, that a conscientious well-disposed clergyman, like yourself, finds himself obliged either to refuse the performance of an office at the risk of being pointed at as a monster by the majority of his countrymen, or commit a positive disobedience to the authority he has most solemnly bound himself to obey, by performing it. There must

be something wrong in the machinery, for it does not work well."

"I confess, Sir," replied the Rector, "that under the present painful circumstances of the Church, many of her wisest and best sons are anxious to see her severed from all alliance with an unfaithful and heretical State."

"And your wise men are quite in the right of it," returned his uncle. "No Church can be free that wears the livery of the State. And as to a State held in servitude by the Church, as the alternative to which your wishes seem to point, my young friend, I suspect that there is but small chance of your living to see them gratified. A State in subservience to the Church, is a tremendous spectacle, let it appear wherever it may; but in Great Britain, it would indeed be a terrible and monstrous calamity—so terrible, and so monstrous, that in these days of reading and thinking there is no danger of its befalling us. We should be just as likely to extinguish gas, and prohibit the use of steam by Act of Parliament, as to permit the priesthood to take possession of the Government. No, James, you must not look for that, you must rest contented with the perfectly free use

of the tongue, and the pen; these are decidedly the only *spiritual* arms proper for reasonable creatures to employ. But then, you know, you must allow an equally free use of them to all; and then with a free stage, and no favour from either privileges, endowments, or dignities, all parties may fight a faithful battle for the truth; and no honest partisan of her cause, ever wished to employ any other weapons in her defence."

CHAPTER XIX.

The little country town of Doucham was about equally distant from Stanton Parva and from Brandon Abbey, not being above four miles distant from either. It was one of those quiet, unpretending, and apparently unmeaning congregations of houses which suggest to a passing stranger many puzzling speculations as to why they ever congregated there at all. Doucham possessed no commercial or manufacturing facilities whatever; neither had it a cathedral, or an important agricultural market, or a venerable fortress, nor even the slightest trace of a ruined castle. Yet there stood the white-washed clean-looking little town, with its two thousand and odd inhabitants, all appa-

rently finding the means of subsistence by selling bread, cheese, bobbins, beer, and calico, to each other.

Some few years ago, indeed, the little town of Doucham really possessed an important source of prosperity; but this had quite passed away from it, and left it stricken with a species of apathy, which it shared with many other townlets.

It was situated on one of the most frequented high roads in the kingdom, and at a very favourable distance from London for all the purposes of a great hotel; and accordingly it possessed a great hotel, which brought employment and profit to very many.

It was a great "coaching station," and nearly fifty well-appointed mails and stage-coaches had been wont to pass through Doucham every four-and-twenty hours, and the majority of them had stopped to breakfast, dine or sup at "The Castle;" for in the days when railroads were not, and the English public were contented to creep along, either for business or pleasure, at the rate of twelve miles an hour, "The Castle" at Doucham had been one of the most celebrated inns in England. Its ale, its trout,

its rounds of beef, and its cheese, had all earned a reputation, known and admitted "all down the road."

The straggling High Street of the little town was accordingly very rarely to be found without a handsome team, and its attendant throng of ostlers and idlers, standing before "The Castle" door. In truth, the custom at the inn, and the busy movement in the town, were pretty nearly unceasing. No sooner had the 'Highflyer,' up, rattled off on its way to the capital, than the 'Wonder,' down, dashed into its place. Even the old 'Heavy Blue,' carrying its six insides, and travelling only at the lazy rate of nine miles an hour, and which was decidedly looked upon as an antideluvian specimen of a former era—even the 'Heavy Blue' managed to reach "The Castle" at Doucham on its way down, in time to get its early breakfast there after its night's journey.

But all this prosperity, and all this bustle, forsook both Doucham and its "Castle" when steam was made to do the work which horses had done in by-gone days. The wide-spreading, great inn, with all its huge appendages, looked as forlorn and as useless as a wrecked vessel left high and dry upon the shore.

As it had not business enough left to pay its window-tax, it was perforce closed, and was rapidly progressing towards decay, when the melancholy process was suddenly stopped, and a new period of existence opened to its renovated roof, stuccoed walls, and newly-sashed windows. It fortunately occurred to the active brain of the now celebrated Dr. Limpid, that the old "Castle" inn at Doucham would be admirably well suited for an hydropathic establishment.

He was a man of great energy, and very heartily in earnest, both in his faith in the curative effects of cold water, and in the power of courage and enterprize to convert the poor, bankrupt, miserable-looking "Castle," into a flourishing and highly profitable place of resort for invalids. The country was beautiful; and the streams by which it was watered were as clear and almost as cold as those of Gräffenberg itself.

The result proved him to have been well inspired when he boldly resolved to risk all he possessed in the world upon this speculation; for, at the time that the closely-united friends, Lady de Paddington and Mrs. Fitzjames, decided upon paying it a visit, the establishment enjoyed so high a reputation, both for the

success of the system practised there, and for its many agreeable features as a place of fashionable resort, that none of its very numerous apartments were untenanted for many days together.

Our two ladies, however, and their one attendant waiting-maid, were fortunate enough to find a set of apartments unoccupied, which they both declared would suit them better than any other in the house; and they were both perfectly sincere in saying so, for they were the best and the dearest; circumstances which were equally agreeable to them both. For Lady de Paddington never thought anything too good, or too dear for her use, provided she had nothing to do with the paying for it; and Mrs. Fitzjames was in the humour to think that scarcely anything could be dear enough, and that for the especial reason that she was to pay for it; for did she not know, that the more she paid, the more precious she should become to her valued, her most sincerely valued companion; and that, moreover, the more highly she paid, the more certain she became of being *repaid* with very stupendously compound interest?

The usual plan of life among such of the inmates as really came there in search of health, was for each of them to inhabit a somewhat miniature bed-room during the few spare half-hours which were allowed between the duties of ducking, packing, exercising, and eating.

The latter operation was performed by the majority of the patients in a very large dining-room, at a table presided over by the doctor in person. But Dr. Limpid was much too observing and too clever a man, not to have discovered that he should cut himself off from one very important source of profit, if he insisted upon it that all his visitors, or even all his patients, should conform to one mode and manner of life. It was, therefore, his invariable custom in the first interview between himself and all newly-arrived guests, to ascertain by the careful exertion of all the acuteness, and all the skill he possessed (and he was by no means deficient in either), what their condition of health really was. If they had any malady which in his heart he believed could be removed, or alleviated by the application of his special remedy, and the assisting discipline by which he knew it ought to be accompanied, no

man could be more steadfast in the rigid rules he laid down for their observance. "Sancho's dread Doctor, and his wand," was nothing, in the way of tyranny, to be compared to him; and so genuine was his faith in his recipe, and so sincere his love of the science he professed, that he absolutely and constantly refused to receive any such patients, if they refused compliance with his regulations.

But far different was his system, when he discovered that the parties applying for accommodation at his establishment were seeking amusement, instead of health. To these he was as indulgent as he was the reverse to really suffering invalids; but they had to pay for this indulgence in current coin of the realm, and rather extravagantly, perhaps; whereas, his really most valued customers, if they were but obedient to command, had nothing to complain of on that score.

It was about six o'clock on a bright summer evening, that the neat travelling chariot, hired for the occasion by the spirited Mrs. Fitzjames, rattled along the High Street of Doucham, and drew up in high style at the ever-open door of the very gay and thriving-looking "Hydropathic Establishment."

The inquiry for "rooms" having been promptly and satisfactorily answered; and the sufficiently high price demanded for them having been agreed to by Mrs. Fitzjames, in an audible aside dialogue with the doctor's confidential factotum and manager, the travellers were immediately ushered into their comfortable-looking apartments; and requested to say, whether it was their purpose to take their meals at the doctor's table "with the patients," or in their own rooms.

"Mercy on me, Mrs. Fitzjames! what does the man mean?" ejaculated Lady de Paddington, almost in a scream. "Eat our meals at a public table kept on purpose for sick people? What could have made you bring me to such a place as this? Eat with the patients! For Heaven's sake, do not let them take the horses off! Let us return instantly. I would not stay an hour in this house, if you would give me a thousand worlds!"

This was uttered with such passionate vehemence, that any effort to stop her Ladyship before the burst was over must have been vain. But the moment she paused to take breath, the civil factotum on one side, and the affectionate Mrs. Fitzjames on the other, united

their efforts to tranquillize her agitated mind; and by degrees they brought her to comprehend, that if she chose to order that a table should be spread for her in private every hour of the day she would be obeyed.

This assurance had the effect of making her rather more composed; but, nevertheless, there was something in the wording of the factotum's assurances, which seemed to make a painful impression on the nerves of Lady de Paddington.

"I order meals for every hour of the day?" she replied, in a tone of fretful resentment. And then turning round on her companion, she added, in a half-whisper: "You know, perfectly well, Mrs. Fitzjames, that I never agreed to order anything."

"Good Heavens! no," exclaimed the beautiful widow, "of course not. Sit down, dearest Lady de Paddington, upon that pleasant-looking sofa near the window, and let me settle everything. That was our bargain, you know; and we can remain together on no other terms."

"Yes, my dear, I will leave everything to you," said her Ladyship, now looking round at the pretty little showy room with very considerable satisfaction. "I will not plague you, my

dear Mrs. Fitzjames, by saying anything more about anything: you shall manage it all yourself, my dear."

Perfectly well satisfied that so it should be, Mrs. Fitzjames turned with a very business-like air to the factotum, and said:

"Perhaps, Sir, it would be the best plan for me to see Dr. Limpid himself?"

"Yes, to be sure, my lady," replied the man "and of course he will come to wait upon your Ladyship in no time, without my going to call him; for he would never think of neglecting his duty by staying away from such ladies as you are. But if you will be pleased to wait only for one minute, I will let him know."

And so saying, the profoundly respective deputy placed an arm-chair at the window, into which the widow threw herself, saying, as she did so: "Make haste, if you please."

But no haste was just now necessary on the part of Mr. Brown, the worthy factotum, for before he could reach the door, it was opened by Dr. Limpid himself.

Dr. Limpid, some fifteen years ago, had started in life as a "general practitioner," and, for a few years, got on in the neighbourhood of London very prosperously. But then,

unfortunately, he fell in love with one of his patients; and, as her family would not consent to the marriage, he ran away with her. And, as they neither of them wished to return to the gossiping little town from whence they had made their escapade, he took it into his scheming head that he would set off with his bride for Gräffenberg, and make himself acquainted with the mystery which was in action there.

It is but justice to the honesty of Dr. Limpid, to say that there was no mixture of quackery in the determination at which he soon arrived —that thenceforth he would practise hydropathy in preference to any other medical system. But if there was no quackery in the manner in which he adopted the principle, it is impossible to deny that there was a little in the style in which he adopted the practice. In former days, when Dr. Limpid, then plain Mr. Limpid, had been a "general practitioner," he had always, with very scrupulous attention to propriety, assumed the garb of his profession, and attired himself in black; moreover, he had constantly presented himself to his patients with an aspect and carriage of very profound and philosophical-

looking gravity. But with a change of scene came, as was perfectly proper and fitting it should do, a change of decoration. A blue silk handkerchief was now always loosely knotted round his throat, in place of the former spotless white neckcloth. His black hair was now worn rather long, and rather in disorder; and a loose grey shooting jacket, and still looser pair of trowsers, completed an habiliment which, speaking of any branch of his profession, save the one he had adopted, was as little professional as it was well possible it could be."

Nor had the versatile philosopher neglected to adopt with equal skill his voice, his bearing, and the tone of his conversation to his present style of practice. In place of the subdued, grave, thoughtful aspect of his early life, he now spoke and moved like a man always in a state of the most gay and exuberant spirits. His voice was loud, and his laugh louder. True it is, that the doctor's patients almost invariably manifested a similar appearance of emancipation from all the cares and sorrows of life; and that after a short residence under his roof, they almost all seemed animated by the same abundant animal spirits, and youthful joyousness.

Whether all this was quite genuine, may perhaps be doubted; but it was quite impossible to believe that it was all feigned.

"Welcome to Doucham, ladies," joyously exclaimed the joyous-looking doctor, as he entered the room.

"There can be no hope I presume," he added, after contemplating the elder lady for a second, and the younger one for rather more, "there can be no hope of your joining our evening family meal to-night? Tired, I suspect, ladies? Fatigue of journey, followed by a little lassitude? All quite natural. Nothing to alarm. You will soon forget all that sort of thing here. Nobody is ever languid here; no lassitude at Doucham; debility absolutely prohibited. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Of course, all that is very desirable," replied the beautiful widow, languidly. "But just at present, Sir, we really are very much fatigued, and we were just going to order tea when you came in."

"Tea at Doucham!" exclaimed the gay doctor, laughing, and rubbing his hands with every appearance of being excessively amused. "Tea

at Doucham! Poison in the temple of Hygeia! Oh! fie! fie! fie! Why, the very act of boiling water, my dear ladies, is turning the glorious element into the means of destruction, whether administered inwardly or outwardly. However, my dear ladies, I, myself, am no fanatic; I am only a philosopher. It is therein that my establishment differs from all others of the kind. I most carefully guard my mind from everything approaching fanaticism. What tea do you take, my dear ladies—black, or green?"

"Let us have both, if you please," replied Mrs. Fitzjames, dismissing him with a somewhat haughty, but very graceful bow, "it is possible that we may take it mixed."

"Both!" exclaimed the doctor, again laughing and gaily rubbing his hands. "God grant that the black may prove an antidote to the green, and the green an antidote to the black. And now, ladies, I must wish you good-night, that I may watch over the evening meal of those not blessed with sufficient vigour of constitution to resist the tremendous effects of tea."

And so saying, the merry doctor bowed himself out of the room, and went to join the large party of patients who were assembled round the great table in the public room, drinking copious draughts of cold milk, and eating prodigious quantities of innocent bread and butter.

CHAPTER XX.

The two newly-arrived visitors at the Doucham establishment, sat down to their *tête-à-tête* tea-table with a queer and rather uncomfortable sort of feeling, of having transported themselves to a somewhat savage region.

"What a detestable old fool this doctor seems to be!" exclaimed Lady de Paddington, in a tone which left no doubt as to her being in that state of spirits which is commonly called cross.

"Thank Heaven, dear lady, we shall have nothing more to do with him," replied Mrs. Fitzjames; who, although not at all more disposed to sympathize with the doctor's hydropathic vivacity than her companion, was most deeply anxious to remain where they were, because it was so very particularly certain that they

were at the nearest possible point to the present abode of Lord Goldstable, that it was in their power to reach. "Do let me butter a bit of this toasted roll for you, dearest Lady de Paddington," she continued, in a tone of very affectionate coaxing; "it really is not badly toasted, and the butter looks very countrified and nice."

The only reply to this was the emission of a sound, which was very like a grunt; but Mrs. Fitzjames was engaged in too important a game to permit her skill in the playing it to be in any degree interfered with by her temper; and the toasted roll was prepared, and presented with a most beautiful smile, and such a coaxing request that her dear, dear Ladyship would try to eat, if only a little bit, after her fatiguing journey, that any heart less hard than that of her sour companion must have been melted by it.

"I wonder, Mrs. Fitzjames, whether it would be quite impossible to get anything in the way of sweetmeat in this out-of-the-way place that you have brought me to?" whined Lady de Paddington, as she looked down with ineffable scorn at the little plate so gracefully presented to her.

"At any rate we can but make the experiment," cried the fair creature, springing up, and running to the bell with the most fascinating good-humour; "and if we fail in getting sweetmeat, my dear lady, we will try to get something else. Now you have so kindly and condescendingly consented to be my guest, I shall break my heart if I cannot contrive to get you anything you can eat."

The bell was very promptly answered, and sweetmeat obtained. But Lady de Paddington was one of those hard-to-manage individuals of whom we have probably all seen specimens here and there, who, although particularly well disposed to have all they want and wish for, provided at the cost of another, have, nevertheless, a strong propensity to disparage everything which they have not provided themselves; and the sweetmeat, although very good sweetmeat, was voted by her Ladyship to be very miserable stuff indeed.

Mrs. Fitzjames was at first very seriously alarmed by this declaration, backed as it was by remarks equally unfavourable upon the tea, cream, bread, butter, &c.; and her very heart sunk within her as she contemplated the pos-

sibility of her dainty Ladyship's declaring that she must go home again or starve. But this anxiety was speedily removed as the business of the tea-table proceeded; and being ere long requested, with very little ceremony, to ring the bell for more cream, more bread, and more butter, the spirits of Mrs. Fitzjames rose to such a degree, that she joyously clapped her little hands, and rather danced than walked, in order to comply with the welcome command.

And then it was that she recollected, with unmitigated satisfaction, that she was at that moment actually within a short mile or two of the game she was hunting! She had great confidence in herself and in her own powers of fascination, feeling no doubt whatever of being able both to strengthen and to rivet the chain which she had already so very adroitly thrown over her intended prey, could she only keep him sufficiently within reach to enable her to use the power she was so fully conscious of possessing over him.

Yes! there she was, within three short miles of him: and there sat the only relative he had left in the world who could attempt to exercise either authority or influence over him. There

she sat, in such evident enjoyment of the gratis goods provided for her, that the clever widow, despite all her acute anxiety on the subject, felt most comfortably certain that if she could but contrive to go on with this venerable relative as successfully as she had began, her most ambitious hopes would be realized.

"What was to be done next?" was the question she asked herself, while Lady de Paddington was sipping her third cup of tea. Of course the first step for her to take would be to convey the news of her near vicinity to her adorer. That it would be very easy to do, and so far all was well. She was disagreeably conscious, however, that the strange accident, whatever it might be, which had brought Walter Harrington to Brandon Abbey, might put some difficulties in her way—such difficulties, indeed, as might have proved fatal had she not, *per contra*, been armed by the presence and protection of so very important an ally as Lady de Paddington.

She never examined herself as to the reasons which made her so confident that Walter Harrington was, and would be, her enemy. This was quite a matter of instinct, and she had no more doubt about it than she would have felt

concerning the danger of being drowned if she had been bound hands and feet and thrown into the sea.

Having seen Lady de Paddington push her empty cup away with the air of a person very decidedly determined to make no further use of it at present, she took the said cup in her hand, and deposited it on the tea-tray with a gentle, but rather melancholy sigh.

"You will take no more?" she said. "Ah, my dear lady, I fear that you did not bargain for so arduous an undertaking as our expedition is likely to prove. You did not expect to find yourself so badly accommodated?"

"Miserable enough!" grunted her Ladyship, pushing herself and her chair away from the no-longer interesting tea-table.

"I am afraid so; and it grieves me more than I can tell you! But at all events, dearest Lady de Paddington, let us lose no time in achieving our object, so that our stay at this dismal place may be as short as possible. I should be so delighted to take you with me, if you would do me the honour to accompany me, to some gay watering-place, where you would be more comfortable. But now that we are in this disagreeable

place, our great care must be to make our coming here contribute to forwarding the object before us. Perhaps, dear lady, the best way will be for you to write a little note immediately to our dear Edward, apprising him of our near neighbourhood. What think you? I really cannot bear asking you to exert yourself to-night, when I well know that you must be so completely tired. And yet, dearest Lady de Paddington, it is impossible to deny that your doing so would be the best way of our putting everything *en train*. If the note can be written to-night, I will take care that it shall be sent over to Brandon Abbey before you are up to-morrow morning.

And so saying, the active beauty immediately opened her little travelling writing-desk, and placed it, with all writing materials ready, before the yawning Lady de Paddington. Nor was this prompt activity in vain, for after a few grumbling expletives, the following letter was written:

"Egeria House, Doucham.

"I flatter myself, my dear nephew, that you are sufficiently aware of the very sincere affection I have for you, to feel some degree of pleasure at hearing that I am near you. I have

cŏme to this place because it has been so strongly recommended to me on account of my rheumatism; and if it agrees with me as well as I hope and expect, I shall probably remain here for some time. You will not be displeased, I imagine, though it is probable you will be a little surprised, when I tell you that your new acquaintance, but nevertheless the old friend of your early youth, has very kindly accompanied me hither. Strange as it may seem to you, my dear Edward, it is really quite true, that Mrs. Fitzjames is with me. A happy chance has made us better acquainted with each other than we were before you left town, and I can truly say that the more I see of her, the more I am delighted at being able to class her among my intimate friends. She certainly is a very charming person, my dear Edward, and your having so immediately discovered this, does honour to your taste and your discernment. This is all I have time to say on the subject at present, excepting that I feel myself bound in honour to confess to you that I no longer wonder at your sudden change of sentiment respecting that silly Miss Harrington; she really was not decently civil to me when her mother brought her to call upon me after their ball! And I must be stupid

indeed, if I could not appreciate the difference between her manners and those of my present charming companion. But I must not run on scribbling about her any more now, for it is getting quite late, and I am very tired. In truth, my dear Edward, I am very far from strong, and it was quite necessary that I should come here, or somewhere, to recruit after the London season. It is all very well for young people to go on all through the summer, calling it spring all the time; but it won't do for me.

"God bless you, my dear Edward! Do not let it be very long before we see you. I am quite impatient for you to show us your beautiful Abbey; I am told that it is really a very noble place. Believe me now and ever, your affectionate aunt,

"Mary de Paddington."

Nobody, I presume, will doubt that Mrs. Fitzjames took excellent good care that this important epistle should be forwarded to its address with as little delay as possible; and the result of her prompt measures was, that the letter reached his lazy Lordship's hands at least half an hour before his usual hour of rising.

CHAPTER XXI.

The first effect of this most unexpected announcement, of the near vicinity of the *most* charming, and the *least* charming lady of his acquaintance, was to flush his young Lordship's cheeks to crimson. The only distinct impression that his great-aunt had left upon his memory was, that beyond all comparison she was the ugliest and the most disagreeable old lady he had ever seen in the whole course of his life. To hear, therefore, that she was within three miles of him, could not be very agreeable to his feelings.

It was not, however, because he any longer dreaded her interference and assumed authority, for he had already become very completely and

very agreeably conscious of his perfect independence of all the old women in the world. But although he had, in a very great degree, got rid of the excessive shyness which had so tortured him when he first presented himself to his redoubtable great-aunt, he could not forget it; neither could he forget nor forgive the disagreeable tone of authority in which she had pointed out to him his own deficiencies; and still less could he either forget or forgive the terrible scrape she had got him into, by persuading him that the only way in which he could feel himself comfortably at ease, like other men of rank and fashion, was by immediately proposing himself to Miss Harrington.

The very undisguised offering of eye and lip worship, which he received from pretty nearly every one who approached him, had already taught him very effectually to understand how utterly false all the old lady's assurances had been, as to the necessity of his being immediately married in order to be considered as a man of consequence; and this, together with the galling recollection of his having promised his dearly beloved old Walter

Harrington, that he would write to his solemn, dignified, and awfully reverend brother, to announce the withdrawal of his silly proposal, caused the sight of her name, and the announcement of her vicinity, to produce nothing in the first instance, but the very vehement pronunciation of the single word "d—nation."

Could the beautiful Sophia have heard this, and could she have been aware how very completely (for the moment at least) her adored image, and her worshipped name, had been merged and lost sight of in the detested image and the execrated name of her costly and very troublesome companion, she might have been tempted to suspect that this said companionship boded more mischief to her hopes than could easily be counteracted by all the patronage which the noble dowager could give, and which she had toiled for and obtained with so much trouble and expense.

She would not, however, have thought her cause quite lost could she have seen the smile and the heightened colour which was produced by the memory of her fascinations, as soon as his first emotions of anger and vexation at

hearing of the threatened visitation of his terrible great-aunt had subsided.

He decidedly felt a good deal touched, and a good deal flattered too, at her having so speedily arranged a journey which had certainly not been in her contemplation when they parted, and which he could account for only by believing that the most earnest wish of this beautiful creature was to be again near him.

And when this very agreeable idea had once got possession of him, he speedily forgot all about the disagreeable old lady who was her companion, and a multitude of pleasant thoughts and pleasant projects succeeded to the fit of ill-humour, which the sight of Lady de Paddington's name had produced.

He suddenly remembered that his bewitching Sophia had never yet seen him with any of the appendages of rank and station about him He had walked from his own lodgings to hers, just as any ordinary person might have done; but now the case would be widely different. He remembered, with very great satisfaction, how very big and how very grand-looking his house was, and he was fully determined that it

should not be long before she saw it. Neither did he forget that he had abundance of carriages and horses, and servants, all of which should be speedily displayed before those beautiful eyes of hers. And then he grew, by degrees, to be quite sentimental, and began thinking how delightful it would be to pass hour after hour with her under the fine shady trees of his own park, where it would be so easy for them to wander and wander away, like true lovers, as they certainly were, where nobody could see them!

It is true, that in the midst of these delightful thoughts the puzzling question more than once recurred to him, as to how in the world it could have happened that his old aunt and the beautiful widow should so speedily have formed a friendship, intimate enough to have brought them together as companions to the Water Establishment at Doucham?

The arrangement was certainly a strange one, and might have puzzled a much more acute personage than our friend Lord Goldstable. He could scarcely be said to have suspected any mischief in this sudden and improbable intimacy; still less could he suspect that if there

were mischief, he could be intended as the victim of it; but he certainly would have felt more comfortable had his lovely widow presented herself in his neighbourhood with a less disagreeable companion.

Either, however, upon the principle of taking the goods the gods provide without grumbling, or else because he was really too happy at the thought of so soon seeing his bewitching enslaver again, to be disposed to quarrel with anything, he prepared to meet his old new friend at the breakfast-table with a gay aspect and a light heart.

Walter Harrington, meanwhile, had also received a letter, not in his bed indeed, like his lazy young Lordship, but in the open air. The active old man was pacing backwards and forwards on the noble terrace behind the house; but his step was less alert than usual, for his thoughts were busy with rather gloomy meditations on the subject of poor Kate's future destiny; for not all the sanguine hopefulness of his temper could prevent him from fearing that the chances were heavily against his receiving any good news from Henry, as the result of his

promised inquiries concerning the character and habits of life of the young man who he had liked so cordially, and esteemed so sincerely.

These meditations, which were not interrupted, though they were loudly accompanied by the far from unpleasing chorus of the thriving rookery which had held its domain in the great avenue much longer than the lords of the land who had planted it, was brought to a sudden conclusion by the arrival of a servant, who presented him with a letter, which had been brought by the same hand that had conveyed the despatch of Lady de Paddington to Lord Goldstable.

Walter perceived at the first glance that it was from his nephew Henry. The consciousness that this letter brought the tidings which he was so painfully anxious to receive, sent the blood in a rush to his hale cheeks. He waited for a moment till the man who brought it was at some distance, and then he tore open the paper, and read as follows :

" My dear Uncle,

" I have lost no time, and spared no diligence, in making such further inquiries respecting Cald-

well as you suggested before you left town; and most sincerely do I grieve to say, that I have no good news to communicate."

The old man suffered the hand which held the letter to fall heavily at his side, while his active step suddenly ceased to advance; and with his eyes fixed upon the ground, he stood for a moment or two with an aspect of such profound discouragement and grief, as proved that these words had quite overpowered his usual philosophical serenity.

"Poor child! poor child!" he groaned aloud. "How shall I find words in which to tell her this? And yet," he added mentally, "ought we not to rejoice, earnestly and thankfully to rejoice, that the information has reached us in time to prevent her becoming the wife of a gambler? It might so easily have chanced, had I had time before this terrible discovery, to remove all obstacles, as I so fully purposed to do. Thank God! that I have not this to answer for!" Assuredly there was consolation in this, though it came mixed with so much present suffering; and old Walter returned to the perusal of the letter, which went on thus:

"I have never seen the fellow since the me-

morable evening of our excursion to Aylesbury Street, but I have contrived to hear much concerning him from three or four of his intimate associates. It is but justice that I should repeat among the rest, that the only vice that seems to be laid to his charge is that of gambling. All these men speak of him as a careless, good-tempered fellow, and as being a fool only in his infatuated passion for play. They, every one of them, I think, used in speaking of him, the phrase so constantly repeated in describing individuals who pass their lives in the active pursuit of their own destruction. Every one of these dear friends of Caldwell's would, I dare say, be ready to sign a certificate in his favour, declaring that he was 'no one's enemy but his own.' But even to this meagre praise *we* could not put our hands. Alas, poor Kate! I greatly fear that he will have proved himself an enemy to her, and that it will be long, very long, before she recovers her peace of mind. She is not the sort of girl to have attached herself lightly, and I know that it will not be lightly that she will forget him. This idea is very, very painful! Her temper is so sweet, and her gaiety so bright and so

innocent, that I cannot endure to think of the cloud that is hanging over her, though as yet she sees it not. There is comfort, however, and very solid comfort, in the fact that our information came not too late to save her from becoming Caldwell's wife. There is no doubt in the world that he is a confirmed, habitual, and very desperate gambler. I comfort myself with thinking that when the first burst of grief at this terrible discovery is over, she will be as thankful as we are for its having been made in time to save her from being the wife of such a man. By the way, I will give you an odd bit of information, which I picked up by mere chance in the course of this painful investigation, and which may serve as a useful hint to your young host, leaving it to your discretion to make such use of it as you may see fit. You cannot, I am sure, have forgotten the beautiful vision which flashed upon us upon the famous night of our grand ball, in the form of a very lovely widow called Mrs. Fitzjames. She certainly was one of the most beautiful women I ever saw. We owed the doubtful honour of her appearance among us to the free and easy patronage of my

mother's old, but not very highly valued acquaintance, Miss Puddingthwaite. This beautiful Mrs. Fitzjames attracted and fixed more eyes upon herself on that memorable occasion than any other person present. One reason for this was unquestionably the extraordinary beauty of her person. Another, scarcely less influential, was the marked devotion paid to her during the greater part of the evening, by the great golden lion of the season, Lord Goldstable.

"Now it so happened that in the course of my perquisitions among the low play-world of the West-end, I was thrown in the way of a certain Captain Fowler, who, as I have every reason to believe, is a most complete and thorough scamp, of the genuiue black-leg breed.

"It is not very probable that you should have ever seen him, but if you have, you would not easily forget him. He is very tall, and strikingly handsome, though evidently on the wane in that respect, probably more from fast living, than from slow time.

"But my attention was specially attracted to him by the strange, and in some sort puzzling,

discrepancy between the undeniable advantages of his striking person, and the strangely strong feeling of dislike, instead of admiration, which it inspired.

"'Who is that remarkably detestable-looking, handsome man?' said I to the friend who I had selected as my aide-de-camp in my search after gambling gossip.

"'Oh! that fellow! He is a certain Captain Fowler, and about as atrocious a *chevalier d'industrie* as London can boast at this moment,' was the answer. 'He is, they say,' continued my informant, 'the very particularly dear friend of that beautiful woman who somehow or other contrived to get to your mother's ball, and to whom the newly-risen star, Lord Goldstable, paid such marked attention.'

"Now, if that very fair lady contrives to introduce that very young gentleman to this very great rascal, you may depend upon it, Uncle Walter, that his acres will make themselves wings and be off. As such accidents as the melancholy one I have thus predicted are, unfortunately, not particularly rare, I doubt if I should have remembered the risk of it thus

long, had it not been for the interest you seem to take in the golden calf, who in the present instance seems to be in such imminent danger of being melted.

"Believe me, my dear uncle, your very affectionate nephew.

"HENRY HARRINGTON."

It was some time before the gossiping hint contained in the latter part of young Harrington's letter received much attention from his uncle. The confirmation of all he had so earnestly tried to disbelieve respecting Caldwell, and the immediate necessity of making known to poor Kate the terrible discovery that had been made concerning one whom she had so perfectly esteemed, and so devotedly loved, occupied all his thoughts. He immediately decided upon no longer delaying to communicate the fatal news to her. The old man felt that there would be no mercy in adopting any half-and-half measures in doing this, and that there could, in truth, be nothing but cruelty in allowing her to cherish any sort of hope in her heart that there could be any exit but one from the affair. In short, however painful it might be

to her, it must be put an end to by herself, and that peremptorily, definitely, and at once.

It was with an aching heart, good man, that he resolutely determined upon walking over to Stanton as soon as breakfast was over, in order to perform the painful duty that had fallen upon him.

END OF VOL. II.

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